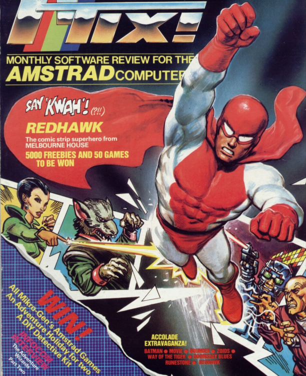
A NEWSFIELD PUBLICATION
No.8 June 1986
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AMTIX!

MONTHLY SOFTWARE REVIEW FOR THE
AMSTRAD COMPUTER



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Gremlin Graphics Software Limited, Alpha House, 10 Carver Street, Sheffield S1 4FS. Tel: 0742-753423



AMTIX!

ISSUE 8 JUNE 1986

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A NEWSFIELD PUBLICATION

Cover by Oliver Frey

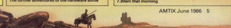
JUNE SPECIALS

THE MAIN HEADINGS

TOP GAMES FOR JUNE

AMTIX! COMPETITIONS

The next issue of AMTIX! goes on sale from the 19 June, and there are really very few people in the world who will forgive you if you're not already queuing outside your newsagent's door by 7.30am that morning




SOFTW
GAMES F
HARD-
PLA
FRANKIE
GOES TO HOLLYWOOD
I can't believe this game!, it's like I've bought a dozen different games for the price on one! Anyway, here I am in the land of mundane, a real cool dude checking out everything around, I even found a floppy disc in a washing machine! And then I stumbled on the game cassettes — "Cybernetic Breakout," "Raid Over Merseyside," "War Room" and there's more. I got to the Shooting Gallery where I really gave Maggy Thatcher some stick. I've been playing Frankie for three days now and I still haven't sussed who pulled the hyste in the Murder Mystery.
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RELAX
ocean
BAM
RAMBO
FIRST BLOOD PART II
POW
8·95
I missed the film but I've got all the action here... in fact if Thorn EMI wanna make Rambo Strikes Back all they have to do is film me in action on this joystick. I picked up my machine gun, wiped out half the jungle with my explosive war head, (that's not my brain!), but that look-out post just keeps on zapping me — I'll get him next time round. I haven't got to the chopper yet... I've got to get my act together, if Thorn EMI saw my last attempt it'd only be good for Rambo Carries on Laughing!
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THE KING IS DEAD — LONG LIVE THE KING?



The next time a snooty Sinclair user makes some contemptuous remark about your beloved 6128, you can remind him that Amstrad boss Alan Sugar, one-time street trader and jumped up hifi salesman, bought out the prestigious and aloof Sinclair Research with his pocket money.

The takeover deal — involving a mere £5 million — has been estimated as costing Amstrad the equivalent of one month's profit. It'll hardly dent the bank balance. To Sir Clive Sinclair, on the other hand, it probably meant the difference between solvency and liquidation.

And where it must really hurt, of course, is that Sinclair lost out to a man who takes pride in being deliberately obtuse about matters technical, persisting in talking about 'glueing on' upgrades and powering micros with elastic bands. The gulf between streetwise Sugar and Sinclair's head-in-the-clouds intellectualism couldn't be greater.

So, while Spectrum owners try to get used to life without that familiar freckled and bespectacled boffin, what does the takeover mean to the evergrowing hordes of Amsters?

In the short term, not much. Sugar's main concerns are mostly with tying up the loose ends of the Sinclair operation — improving quality control, dumping the QL overseas as fast as he can, and dropping the price of the unbundled Spectrum Plus to under £100.

Once stocks of the Plus have been exhausted it will be discontinued, leaving Amstrad with only the recently launched Spectrum 128, and even that Sugar plans to completely revamp in the autumn, glueing on a datacorder and a couple of joystick ports. None of this affects the Amstrad market very much, except to give Sugar an immediate return on his £5 million and make him even wealthier.

Sugar has also made it clear that whatever add-ons are to be included with the Spectrum 128, a monitor won't be one of them. 'If you start adding screens, you start killing off Amstrad — and we mustn't forget who we are,' he has said. So it is unlikely that there will be a range of Sinclair-badged Amstrad lookalikes.

While the improved Spectrum 128 looks set to dominate amongst games-playing machines, Amstrad computers will continue to make inroads into the word processing and PC markets. The promised Sinclair Pandora CP/M portable would have slotted into this range, but now it is unclear whether Amstrad will be marketing it or not. In the meantime Amstrad will be concentrating on its IBM-compatible PC, due to be launched at the end of May.

So, to some extent, it looks as if it's business as usual, with Sinclair and Amstrad machines selling into different and non-competitive areas of the home computer market. Nevertheless, there has been a fundamental change, and the implications of it are quite disturbing.

Alan Sugar now effectively controls the UK home computer market, with the only real contenders being Atari and tired Commodore. It signifies an end to the price wars which nearly crippled the industry 18 months ago, but it is an end, too, to the days when customers could pick and choose between a wide range of rival computers at competitive prices. From now on Alan Sugar will be deciding what hardware — and even software — you will buy, and how much it will cost.

And that can't be good for anyone.

EVEN THE ELITE CAN BOOB!

Our friends at Elite Systems have asked us to point out that their game, *Commando*, sells for £9.95 on cassette and not for £8.95 as was stated in last month's issue of AMTIX!

AN AUREOLA OF ACCOLADES

The computer software games is a funny old world. Some months there are very few games worthy of accolade status and then there are unusual times like this month when there are no less than EIGHT accolades. It all bodes well for the future of games on the Amstrad. They are definitely in the ascendency! Well done to all those companies whose games have exceeded the magical 90% overall figure and to those yet to attain this elusive status the message is 'Take up the challenge'!

HELP FROM LEVEL 9

Earlier this year we published a letter in our Lettertech section from a reader asking if any Level 9 adventures were compatible with the CPC 6128. In answering this poser the instructions did not appear quite right. So here are the correct details.

Type **ITAPE** (return)
Type **MEMORY & 2FFF** (return)
Type **LOAD "ADVENTURE",&3000** (return)
Start the tape. Press any key when loaded
Type **CALL & 3000** (return)

SOFTWARE REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

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US GOLD AMTIX


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Here we go again . . . Another batch of informed, succinct, literate, humorous and impartial comments upon the state of the Amstrad industry. And that's just the replies. Some of the letters you've sent in aren't too bad either, even if we do get the occasional bigoted garbage scrawled on a cornflake packet top (though we've come to expect that from Sinclair public relations since the takeover).

As always, a reminder to address your letters to the correct magazine department. Send technical queries and the like to Amtech, and only letters for publication to OTS.

So, let's cut the blather and banter and get down to business. We lead with another wondrous piece of prose which wins our Letter of the Month prize. A voucher for £20 of software will soon be winging its way to erudite Mr Bruce. In the meantime, take it away . . .

WHEN GIANTS ROAMED THE LAND . . .

Dear AMTIX!
I am sure that you too will have noticed the disturbing trend which has appeared recently — that of the increased monopolisation of the software industry. In Britain it is becoming increasingly dominated by a very few large companies. Two recent examples which spring to mind are the US Gold takeover of Ultimate, and the British Telecom acquisition of Beyond and Odin.

This trend has disturbing implications for the freedom and vitality of new ideas. If one or two companies can capture a large enough percentage of the market then they can force titles to be successful by using their massive marketing clout. They can put pressure on retailers to stock their titles, withhold advertising from magazines which give persistently bad reviews, and even buy up magazines and distributors. The consumer might soon be facing a situation where the only easily acquired software is produced by a few companies.

How long will it be before well-loved companies offering individual service, such as Tasman, Level 9, Design Design and HiSoft, become part of the unstoppable faceless corporate machine? Can we expect the quality of service given, for example, by Tasman, to continue if part of a major conglomerate? The fate of a few customers with individual problems will no longer be cause for concern. The imagination which made the British computer scene what it is today may well be in danger of being stifled.

My second point concerns the dearth of disk-based and 128K software for the Amstrad. The Commodore 64 still has a greater proportion of its software released on disk than the Amstrad does. Some companies have the audacity to release disk versions for the Commodore and not for the Amstrad.

All the blame for this shortage cannot be laid at the door of software houses. Amstrad has helped create a shortage of 3in disks, and maintains them at an inflated price. There are some retailers who persistently refuse to stock disk software, so how can software houses be expected to provide disk software if they are unable to find an outlet?

I would suggest that AMTIX! takes a leading role in the campaign for more disk software. For programs not available on disk and where the software house is unwilling to discuss how it can be transferred, even when proof of purchase is given, then AMTIX! should print routines to allow its transfer.

The ordinary disk-drive owner has his part to play, too. They must put pressure on software houses by writing to them, as well as to magazines.

Finally, why after nearly eight months, is there no software which utilises the full 128K of the CPC6128 memory? Within days of the launch of the Spectrum 128 houses were falling over themselves to produce extended versions of earlier 48K games.
B Stuart Bruce, Cleator, Cumbria

This monopolisation of the software industry is not as recent as all that. For years now small independent companies have been swallowed up by the big fish, and many have seen it as a sign that an immature industry, based in the early days on one-man outfits operating out of bedrooms and garages, is at last growing up.

Quicksilva, Lothlorien, Bug-Byte, Imagine, Rabbit, New Generation, Beyond, Ultimate, Odin . . . These and many others have been absorbed to some degree or other by larger companies. Sometimes the outfits are kept as separate entities maintaining relative independence — Ultimate is one such. At other times it is the name only which survives, as the original teams are disbanded and drift away.

And yes, all this can mean less choice for you, the consumer. In practice, though, large software companies are only too aware that however much clout they can wield, whatever the potential there is for putting pressure on magazines and retailers, in the end they can only survive on the quality of the software they produce. If coercion were used to influence reviewers and distributors — and it has been tried — the public might be conned once, but not twice. If you've been caught by an over-hyped product which hasn't lived up to expectations, haven't you thought twice before buying another program from the same company?

As for the remaining independent companies, many survive precisely because they do offer an individual service which the big boys cannot. And, of course, because they operate professionally and produce consistently good software. Make sure you continue to support them!

Your complaints about the lack of disk software have often been voiced in these pages, and once more we echo your sentiments. The tape to disk transfer routines are under consideration (see elsewhere in *OTS*).

And lastly, 128 software is gradually surfacing for the Amstrad, and don't be misled by the Spectrum 128 software currently available. Many of the so-called expanded versions had only sound added (*Rocky Horror Show*) or were run-together versions of games which previously covered more than one tape (*NeverEnding Story*). Genuine 128 Spectrum programs are still pretty thin on the ground.

And that endeth today's lesson. Next month, is christianity compatible with being a software distributor?
OTS

MICE GET STUFFED

Dear AMTIX!,
I've just bought the much-hyped AMX Mouse for my CPC 6128. Everything was fine until I tried to screen dump to my Shinwa CPA 80 printer. It would not work!

I rang AMS who informed me that the printer was not fully Epson compatible and they would be writing some software for this at some future date. My complaint is that they apparently knew that screen dumps could not be performed on the Shinwa using this software. So why didn't they make this clear? When are they going to write this software and will it be supplied free of charge to present mouse owners? In the meantime, Shinwa owners, be warned.
Alan Taylor, Uttoxeter, Staffs

At the moment, we have no information as to the availability of this software from AMS and whether or not it will cost you. It's a shame that such incompatibility problems were not explained sooner and we're sure your warning will be heeded by non-Epson printer owners who are concerned about rolling rodents.
OTS

TRUE GRIT

Dear OTS,
Your magazine is boring! I bought one issue of ZZAP! and it is a lot jollier than AMTIX! God knows how boring and drab CRASH is.

What's this about Gary Penn being Madonna's brother in law? And Julian Rignall (what a poser) having fan mail — the mind boggles!

You state that AMTIX! is independent from ZZAP! and CRASH. Well it isn't because the contents page pictures are the same, only changed from month to month. The layout is also similar. You should introduce Rockford into your margins. I think the reviews in ZZAP! are better than those in AMTIX!

Just one more thing (you'll be pleased to hear). This Terminal Man strip is a piece of Grit. Scrap it.
Rick (Flash) Spence, Co Down, N Ireland

Now hold on a second, Flash. One minute you're telling us that this mag is too similar to our sister publications and the next, you want us to make it even more similar by featuring Rockford. Come on, if you're going to moan, at least moan sensibly. Anyway, aren't you pleased that this mag isn't written by that bunch of weirdos? We've hired new weirdos especially. Some people are never satisfied!
OTS



PREGNANT PAUSE

Dear AMTIX!
I have just bought your magazine for the third time. Now I have sent in an Amtixionnaire, entered a competition and generally had a great time reading AMTIX! from cover to cover. Maybe I should add that I'm not a computer whizz-kid or anything like it, but a wife and mother who likes computers and computer games, playing them and writing them. Especially adventures. That's why I'm writing this letter.

I have written a game with *GAC* and would like to publish it. The thing is, being a relative newcomer to computers, I don't know the first thing about how or whom to submit my adventure to. Are there any rules or formats? Can you give me any addresses to send it to?

Just one more question. I read in a newspaper that the radiation and static emitted by a computer or monitor (can't remember which) was harmful to pregnant women and their unborn babies. Could you possibly shed any light on this matter? We are planning a baby and, if this is true, it would mean putting my 464 back in its box for nine months (dread the thought).
I Ahumada, Leen Valley, Nottingham

You could try showing your game to Incentive (whose address will be on the *GAC* package) as they are interested in games written with their system. Other than that, any software house that produces adventure games might be interested. As to formats, you should send a good map and hint sheets to any prospective publisher along with a useful vocabulary list. All such information should preferably be typed, double spaced with wide margins. Of course, your own name and address should be on anything you send out. Always send copies — keep your original. Good luck to you.

As for radiation, though such fears are possibly groundless, there are some who maintain that it hasn't been proved either way, and therefore advise caution. There is even a company — the name of which escapes us — that sells lead aprons to women who are in constant proximity to VDUs. Even domestic TVs give off some radiation, and the closer you sit, the more you get. To our knowledge, the amount of such static or radiation is nowhere near enough to do any kind of damage to anyone, no matter how delicate their condition, but if you're worried, try asking your GP or local ante-natal clinic.
OTS

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Dear OTS,
Could you please help!! I have no other way of making Amstrad listen to me.

My problem is that I bought a CPC464 in November 85 and sent the guarantee card for registration so that I could take advantage of services and information sent out by the Users' Club. However, it is well over three months since I did this but there has been no response from either the club or the Amstrad after sales services department. I have written twice since then but to no avail.

Have you any advice on how to wake Mr Sugar's fellow men and women in the department and get them to register me?

It's always nice to hear about the company's progress through the media but then, if success goes overboard it is a shameful affair. Please help.
Dr RC Shamma, Bracknell, Berks

Write direct to Jill Stevenson, Customer Liaison, Amstrad, Brentwood House, 169 King Street, Brentwood, Essex. Tell her when and where you bought the machine.
OTS

MANCHESTER: A TRENDY WHITE JACKET WRITES

Dear OTS,
First time I ever wrote to a rag like this was on the touchy subject of ZX81 power supplies! *(Thanks — OTS)* Having upgraded to the 464 (last payment due end of July), these problems go window-wards.

Who should I thank for a wonderful show? Not my best mate who didn't even turn up when I asked him to (dashed unreliable, these Commodore owners, rather like the machines they possess). Possibly the fair city of Manchester which didn't cost me an arm and a leg to get to; possibly the nice man on the Dart Electronics stand who let me have a go with his light pen when all I wanted to do was sit down for a while. No, it has to be AMTIX! who I turned to for the one thing I need above all else at computer shows — a placcy bag.

You remember the kid with the trendy white jacket, grey jeans, curly hair, cold sore, looked absolutely knackered? Well, 'twas me, you'll be glad to know and it was you, in your wisdom, who pointed me towards the Interceptor stand. Thanks . . . for what? Oh yes, the bag. But the bloke looked as if he'd seen an early Virgin game! Far out!

I wandered around, well nearly, when I wasn't playing sardine in a bottleneck, marvelling at 11-year olds with the ability to make their fathers open their cheque books, 'Just this once, Paul, then that's it!' Well, that's my view of the March Amstrad Computer Show, the view that goes further than no view has . . .
Martin Wild, Pontefract, W Yorkshire

Well, er — thanks. It's always interesting to hear another point of view. Isn't it?
OTS

AGEING
AMSTERS FIGHT
BACK

Dear AMTIX!,
I was going to reply to your questionnaire until I got to the question, 'How much pocket money to you spend each week?' What does this include, beer money, mortgages?

As a professional programmer, I get enough of the 'computer games are for kids' attitude at work. You, of all people, should be immune to it. Why can't people realise that computer games are just as valid an entertainment medium as as watching TV or reading a book?

I bought my (green screen) 6128 mainly as a serious programming tool. But I've come to find that playing *Knight Lore* or the like is much more satisfying than programming after a long day at the terminal.

So, come on AMTIX! Your serious software section is way ahead of the competition — please don't assume that we're all young kids whose parents bought us our machines for Christmas. Remember, most Amstrad users are supposed to be second generation micro users and deserve to be treated as such.

RA Ford, Beckenham, Kent

Oops, sorry. Heads will roll in the phraseology department.
OTS



THE PRICE IS ABSENT

Dear AMTIX!,
After reading your issue six I found it was great — right to the last advert. However, I noticed that the review of *Strike Force Harrier* had a price of £x.xx. I carried on looking for a price but just couldn't find one, so please, please could you tell me the price?!
Darren Newham, Swanley, Kent

How embarrassing. Actually, we only did it to see if you were still awake after reading the review of *FA Cup Football*. To put the record straight then, the game costs £9.95 on cassette or £14.95 on disk.
OTS

SKYSNAIL AND THUMBO

Dear OTS,
Being almost sound in mind and body, I hereby declare AMTIX! to be the best mag in the bizz. It has helped me a great deal in choosing software, with one exception. I refer to your review of *Skyfox*, in my opinion, the worst game ever to grace my monitor. While the speedo registers about three million mph, on inspecting the horizon, you appear to be going as fast as a lame snail.

Another moan is about *Rambo*. Wow, I thought when I got my copy. I was disgusted. This must be the worst translation ever. The screen is about as big as my thumbnail, making playing impossible. Tut tut, Ocean.

Next, may I congratulate Melbourne House on their excellent drawing package, *Melbourne Draw*? This short prog is easy to master and can create stunning effects in a short while. Well done.

While we're not on the subject, my next thought concerns fellow Bilbos and shipwrecked heroes amongst you. Isn't it about time the software houses thought up some new ideas for adventures as I'm tired of the same old solutions cropping up. If I see one more snake/serpent being killed by a songbird in a wicker cage, I will not be able to control my alimentary canal.

Finally, a playing tip for *The Hobbit*. When the computer crashes for the sixth time, take the tape out of the data-recorder, place it on a hard surface (eg: concrete). Then strike tape forcibly with a blunt instrument. Or refer to my motto: 'If at first you don't succeed . . . Drop it from a great height.'
Yours, bloodshot-eyed,
Paul Adams, Sheffield
PS Can anyone tell me how to avoid being stung on the bonce in *The Hobbit*?

Certainly. Wear the ring. Continue in your original direction for one move. Wait twice. Continue in original direction for one more move. Those nasty, bulbous eyes should then disappear.
OTS

HOARY CHESTNUT RAISES UGLY HEAD

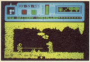
Dear AMTIX!
Thanks for the modem from Cirkit Holdings that I won in the competition you ran. I will now probably run up a large telephone bill trying the features of all the bulletin boards and information services.

Please could we have more information on tape to disk transfer as we are not all expert hackers? Perhaps you could have a monthly page based on readers' experience with transferring tape programs to disk where they give their methods — especially where the programs concerned are not actually available on disk. I know the hoary old question of copyright will raise its ugly head again but compared with tape to tape copying, I think software houses have nothing to fear from people who simply wish to have all their programs on disk.

Secondly, could we have more information about the various hardware add-ons, especially lightpens and mice? I would also welcome more information on the newer printers as it seems that equipment is in the shops before reviews hit the newsstands, probably because of the reluctance of manufacturers to supply products for review.
S Richardson, Ipswich, Suffolk

You're probably only too right about the question of piracy rearing its ugly head again, but we won't let that bother us too much. If readers are interested in submitting their experiences for the edification of others then let's have 'em.

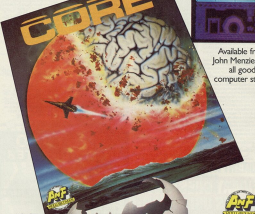
As for add-ons, we'll continue to review them as and when we get them, and a printer feature is in the pipeline. Stay tuned.
OTS











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ON THE SPOT

TECHNOCRAP? GORDON BENNETT!

Dear OTS,
After reading Graham Bennett's letter in issue six, I felt I had to put pen to paper. I have tried all the other Amstrad magazines, including the one that charges 50p for a free gift. I stopped getting these because they were too full of technocrap. Don't get me wrong, I'm not against Amtech. I enjoy reading it sometimes — just don't let it take over.

So let the Bennetts out there take note. If you want all technocrap, buy the magazine that is NOT an official Amstrad publication.

Just a couple of points to finish on. I have calculated that in AMTIX! issue six there were 106 pages, which works out at 0.009p a page. While CRASH issue 27 had 138 pages plus a 24 page playing tips supplement which works out at 0.006p a page. Just because other Amstrad magazines are a rip off doesn't mean that you can jump on the bandwagon. Come on, add a few more pages. Give a few to the Leprechaun for his adventure bit.

Last point: why don't you print the Lunar Jetman strip that appears in CRASH? I'm sure readers who haven't seen it would find it very funny.
Allan Price, Bramley, Leeds

First of all, you wally, your calculations are a couple of decimal points astray. A quid for 106 pages works out at 0.9p a page. And anyway, do you think it's fair to include the CRASH playing tips supplement when it was a one off?

There are all sorts of really boring reasons behind the relative sizes of magazines, such as available material, number of advertising pages, whether the month has an 'r' in it, but just remember that it's quality, not quantity, that counts.

The Jetman strip is purely CRASH material at the moment but as to the future, who knows?
OTS

ITCHY TRIGGER FINGER

Dear OTS,
I was quite surprised when I saw your *Gunfright* map. Why? Well, maybe because *Gunfright* isn't available on the Amstrad yet.

Also, when I buy another (and far better) Amstrad magazine, I notice that you have almost exactly the same games reviewed. Could you be a bit original and do something else for once.

I also wish to complain about your reviewing technique. Take *Spindizzy*. The other mag had clear, well-labelled screen shots. Your screen shots were placed diagonally across the corner of the page and part of the view was obscured. This may look good, but I'm sure that everybody would prefer decent screen shots which show the graphics clearly.

I hope to see some improvement soon because CRASH is a pretty good mag and AMTIX! could be just as good.
James Dyfed, of no address

You read it here first! We have it on good authority that *Gunfright*'s arrival on the Amstrad is imminent. We just jumped the gun a little.

As for reviewing the same games which other mags review, would you rather we wait six months before reviewing any games which appear in the shops? Because otherwise it's inevitable that all magazines will try to be as up-to-date as possible, and review games simultaneously. Bit obvious, we'd have thought.
OTS

A BIT LONG IN THE SABRE TOOTH

Dear OTS,
Come on, is this all you lot can do? Let's have some tips for good games like *Spellbound* and *Sabre Wulf*. The other stuff's brill and all that, but I'm sure you could improve Amtips just a teeny weeny bit . . .
Thomas Parker, Bath, Avon

Watch this space . . . There will be some playing tips on *Spellbound*, but *Sabre Wulf* is getting on a bit. Nevertheless, if someone does send in some wulf lore it could well get printed (hint, hint).
OTS

WHAT'S THE CRACK?

Dear AMTIX!
In the April issue, you make it clear that subscribers are entitled to discounts on every item ordered. But what you don't state is the percentage of the discount. So could you please let me know so I can take full advantage of your superb mail order system?
D Plows, Mildenhall, Suffolk

Here goes. You get 50p discount if you order one game, or 50p discount on orders of up to and including £10, or £1.00 discount on orders of up to and including £20. Confused? No? Good.
OTS

WALLIES AND PRATS SHOCK HORROR

Dear OTS,
How dare he call Amsters wallies and prats. I'm referring to Mr Kevin Hall of Norwich who was going on about people taking the mickey out of his glorious Spectrum. If he thinks his machine is so great, why does he read this mag (prat!)? He should stick to CRASH.

I was pleased to see a preview of *Winter Games* in last month's issue. It really made me feel great to know that US Gold are not sitting on their backsides while anxious Amsters wait for a product which has been advertised for a year (Ocean are good at that).

One more thing. What's all this fuss about *Sorcery*? It must be the most boring game on the market. I admit the graphics are good but the game is lousy. Keep up the good work.
A M, Coventry

There's no answer to that. At least, we can't think of one. Can you think of one, Malc? No, he can't think of one either. On to the next question...

Oh, there isn't one.

Well, guess that wraps it up for this month.

Bit of a lame ending though...

Oh, hang on, though, just in case you don't know where to write to praise AMTIX! (okay, you can bitch as well if you really feel the need), tell us your problems, ideas, brainwaves, complaints about software, hardware and life in general... the address is ON THE SPOT, AMTIX! MAGAZINE, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB
Bye.
OTS

CHEAP AND NASTY

Dear OTS,
I want to subscribe to an Amstrad magazine because I want information about software, tips and pokes. I am deciding between AMTIX! and a certain other magazine.

My friend subscribes to CRASH which I think is great. But why can't AMTIX! be as good? It's a shame that almost every picture is in black and white. I would not mind paying an extra 20p for more colour pictures. Also, there aren't as many reviews as in a certain other magazine.

What about comparisons between similar games like *Way of the Exploding Fist* and *Yie Ar Kung Fu*? It need not always be a comparison of two Amstrad games either.

Four out of 12 games reviewed are cheapies. Surely you can do better than that! I understand that some people can't afford more expensive games but why don't you make such reviews shorter with fewer comments and descriptions? Have more reviews, more up to date and more in colour.

More tips and fewer photographs would not go amiss. How about pokes for tape to disk transfer, and infinite lives? Have some kind of software round-up with the price, a photo and ratings. There are surely many other ideas and no doubt the questionnaire will help but if standards go up, then you will have more buyers and subscribers.
AB Franke, Poole, Dorset

Look, we are talking about AMTIX! aren't we? Our last issue had 32 pages of colour editorial, not counting advertisements, twice as many as another nameless independent Amstrad magazine, which also, incidentally, featured less reviews. No contest.

Also you want less reviews of 'cheapies'. Do we detect a trace of snobbery here? You claim that you understand that some people 'can't afford more expensive games' yet you think that these poor sods should nevertheless be punished by giving budget games less comment and description. Actually, our policy is to approach each game with an open mind, irrespective of price, and give good games long reviews and bad games short reviews. In any case, the games which we review are the games which we receive.

Finally — maybe we're stupid, but we can't see the point of comparing two games which aren't available for the Amstrad in an Amstrad magazine.

Phew. Now that we've got that off our collective chests, we hope you make the only sensible decision and continue to buy AMTIX! Remember, nine out of ten housewives agree that AMTIX! refreshes the parts that other rags cannot reach.
OTS



MOON CRESTA



Incentive Software, £7.95 cass, £12.95 disk

One screen shot you will not see on the game. Cameron the Camera uses some wizardry to produce all three sections of the rocket.



CRITICISM

1 Moon Cresta was one of the original arcade games in the good old days of arcade machines and must rate alongside Galaxians, Asteroids and Space Invaders as one of the grand old fathers of the genre. Unfortunately Incentive's official licence version has only faithfully reproduced the music. The game is still immediately recognisable though, with all the old screens and colours used. At the price it's a good buy for anyone who wants to relive their mis-spent youth in the arcades without having to constantly change money into ten pence pieces.

2 *Even though it is an entertaining game the Amstrad version of* Moon Cresta *seems to be lacking something although it was hard to decide what exactly that something was. The FX did not sound real but, having said that the graphics and colour were good, especially the loading screen. It certainly has some addictive qualities and I found it fun to play.*

3 In my mis-spent youth what I really enjoyed playing, apart from truant, was Moon Cresta, an early space invaders derivative. Hours of fun was to be had mindlessly pumping ten pees into the now ancient box of chips just to get a higher score. Now those days have been faithfully recreated with Amstrad Moon Cresta, a conversion that's very close indeed. It's a great blast and recreates all the thrills and spills that the original more than adequately supplied. The graphics are very neat and the title screen is superlative. The whole game oozes professionalism from every port. At the price it's a snip, have a look soon!

Here's a new game on an old theme that should get the blood racing again! Away with the namby-pamby arcade/adventures! For zap-happy arcade freaks Incentive's new *Moon Cresta* will revive the good old rainy days spent hurling ten penny pieces into the slot of an arcade machine. This is a loving (and official) recreation of the Nichibutsu arcade original, right down to the attract mode with a colourful title page and a message reading, 'Moon Cresta — A trip to the Space War — Try it Now! — You can get a lot of Fun and Thrills!' The major change between the Amstrad version and the original is the panel allowing you to select between the redefinable keyboard controls and joystick options.

Moon Cresta is a classic shoot em up set against a downward scrolling starscape. Your three lives arrive at once as a three-stage rocket which flies to the top and separates, leaving the nose stage to descend afterwards to the base of the screen ready to do battle. If you lose that life then the two remaining stages repeat the process, leaving you with the middle stage to fight on. The first stage has a single-firing laser, the second and third stages each have dual-firing lasers. Your craft moves left and right along the base of the screen while the nine different attack waves try to destroy you. There are four waves, consisting of blue then yellow aliens (which split into a smaller alien when shot) and a red then magenta wave of fighters before you are faced with a docking of the first stage with the second for bonus points. The bonus is based on the time taken to dock as the top craft slowly descends, wavering about and guided by the left/right control and fire to thrust.

This bonus sequence is then followed by five waves of dancing aliens which include diagonally opposed asteroids and white blobs that turn into wrap around missiles if not destroyed in time. Depending on how well you are doing you can earn the right to fight with either two or three stages together as the speed of the aliens hots up. The full display area is used with score lines superimposed at the top.

Presentation 91%
Lots of options, redefinable keys, 2 and 1 player.

Graphics 88%
Pretty title screen but only average game graphics.

Sound 85%
Pleasant in-game ditties and nice sound effects.

Playability 89%
A great, instantly playable shoot em up.

Addictive qualities 88%
Though fun it may bore after lots of play because of its simplicity.

Value for money 90%
Very cheap and worth the small amount of folding stuff asked for it.

Overall 89%
A great game for arcade junkies everywhere.


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BATMAN

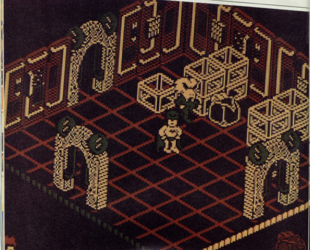
Ocean, £8.95 cass

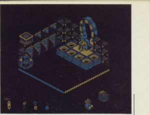
Sitting back over an early evening glass of sherry reverently poured by his faithful butler Alfred, Gotham City's own playboy millionaire, Bruce Wayne, settles down to a quiet evening surrounded by all the comforts afforded to him by his fiscal propensities. Many find his wealth a reason for jealousy, and envy him the life of ease to which he publicly subscribes. However, this evening the round of social chit chat and endless stream of gold plated Tupperware parties must mourn his absence. Bruce Wayne hears that his ward, Dick Grayson, has been kidnapped.

Faced with this colossal calamity, Bruce has no time to waste and in the time that it takes to hurriedly hop across his sumptuous study, pausing only to grab a pair of tights and clean pair of blue briefs, he takes on his secret identity of Batman as he swoops to save Robin.

Gotham City's caped crusader continues his quest against crime in **Ocean**'s new release, *Batman*. In this computerised adventure, our clean-living hero's ever faithful friend, Robin, has been grabbed by an evil arch villain and it's up to Batman to rescue the Boy Wonder from the clutches of the forces of evil.

Once you've configured the controls for the game — defining the keys or joystick and their sensitivity — it's time to choose from the three sound levels available, and Voila! Batman springs into action, sliding down a batpole into the gloomy recesses of the Batcave complex. He's got a problem: the Batmobile doesn't work! Suddenly the superhero remembers — Robin was servicing the batcar when he was abducted, and seven vital Batmobile parts are lying hidden in the Batcave. So unless he wants to arrive to save Robin courtesy of the local bus





service, Batman has to first collect the seven Bat Bits and install them in the Batmobile.

At the start of the game Batman's powers are limited — he can stroll round the caves, and that's about it. He needs to find some Bat Equipment to give him the powers needed to complete his quest. Four vital Bat Devices have to be collected: Jet Batboots (for jumping); Batbag (allows the caped crusader to pick up and put down objects); Bat-thruster (allows horizontal movement when falling) and a Low Gravity Batbelt (halves the speed of a fall).

The Batcave's architects obviously worked on the castle in *Knight Lore* — the resemblance is striking — and the game is viewed and played in the same fashion. Four Bat Device icons in the bottom right hand corner of the screen are highlighted when a piece of Bat Equipment is collected. Four more Bat Icons on the left of the screen are used to display Batman's status. Our hero starts the game with nine lives, and can collect more during his journey by collecting an Extra Life Batpill — the number of lives remaining is shown under a Batsign logo. Three more icons are used to display jumping ability, shield status and energy, and are activated when an appropriate Batpill is collected.



Batpills look like small Batmen, and tend to fall from the roof of the Batcave. They all look the same, and the only way to find out what a Batpill does, is to pick it up and spot which Batpill icon gains a number. If an Energy Batpill is picked up, Batman can move at high speed — a counter beneath the lightning flash icon ticks down with each superfast step until it reaches zero and it's back to a strolling pace. Shield Batpills give Batman invulnerability for a while, and Jump Batpills allow a number of double strength jumps to be made. To add a little extra excitement to the game, Neutralising Batpills turn up now and again, which remove any shield energy and super jumps in Batman's inventory. Bad News, as the instructions say . . .

Another very useful thing in the Bat Cave are Reincarnation Stones. If Batman touches one it disappears after recording the state of play and Batman's position. If Batman fails in his quest and runs out of lives, the game can be continued from the point when Batman last touched a Reincarnation Stone.

The Batcave has been extensively remodelled from the movie days, and it's huge! Unfortunately, there are now some very nasty creatures lurking in the hallowed halls, all of them keen to remove a life from our hero's stocks — one touch from a baddie and it's one life less for the caped crusader. Spiked floors, which usually have dissolving pieces of catwalk above them, are deadly, as are some rather more innocuous objects. Conveyor belts and lifts, as well as suspended, disappearing and sinking floors, also provide problems to an unwary Batperson. Sometimes objects or exits to a room are too high to reach or jump onto, so Batman has to pick up Bat Objects (stuff like Elephant's Feet and Art Nouveau Tea Pots amongst other things) by jumping on them, using the pick up key defined earlier and piling up the bits in order to achieve his goal.

Batman is rushing to rescue his friend — if you leave him standing in once place for too long he crosses his arms and taps a foot impatiently. He wants to collect the Bat Equipment, find the seven parts of the Batmobile so he can teleport to the launch pad, get into the Batmobile, start the motor and get on with rescuing Robin. There's no time to lose . . .

CRITICISM

1 **Despite the fact it is similar to *Knight Lore* I still find this type of game is lots of fun. The front-end menu is great and caters for nearly everything you need, including sound levels. There are lots of well detailed little creatures and objects to admire as you walk (or fly) around Batman's caves. The animation of *Batman* is very lifelike and adds to the realism of the game which I'm sure will appeal to all age groups. The instructions are well balanced so that you can easily get into the game but still find lots of problems that will cause a lot of hassle — or pleasure if you solve them — and nearly every room has something to do in it.**

2 *Batman* is one of the best 3D type games on the Amstrad so far this year. The sound is given a good old blast out of the Amstrad speaker and gives a good rendition of the 70's television music. The graphics are very detailed — especially the pointed 'bat' ears and the little Batman motif on Battie's shirt. I really liked the movement of Batman who struts around in a very hurried manner. I found *Batman* had just the right amount of difficulty — which meant that I could spend a long time trying to work out one bit, but once solved I got through to loads more rooms, with lots of extra things. All the rooms are varied in colour and adorned in different things, varying from plain old rock to shark's teeth. *Batman* is loads of fun to play and will appeal to all age groups.

3 Batman *is a game in a similar style to the* **Ultimate** *collection. The graphics are very colourful and defined in an excellent manner. The loading screen may put a lot of people off, but once you start playing you realise how good it actually is. Overall this is an excellent game with lots of neat touches. Well worth buying.*

Presentation 92%
A high standard, as always, from Ocean.

Graphics 93%
Exceptional detail and lots of colour.

Sound 93%
Good title tune and spot FX during the game.

Playability 92%
A simple enough idea but with lots to think about . . .

Addictive qualities 91%
Instantly enthralling.

Value for money 93%
An above average game at an average price.

Overall 92%
A game for Bat fans and arcade adventure fanatics alike.

MOVIE

Imagine, £8.95 cass.
Author, Dusko Dimitrijevic

Early last year, Dusko Dimitrijevic invested in a one way plane ticket from Yugoslavia to Britain. Confident that he could sell two computer games he had written to **Bug Byte** and thus fund his trip home, he arrived in Liverpool to discover that Bug Byte was no more. Dusko had a bit of a problem.

Fortunately, he managed to track down one of the directors of **Bug Byte**, who advised him to see **Ocean**. The company bought the games from Dusko, and used them as promotional freebies. Before he went home, the Yugoslavian programmer spent some weeks with **Ocean**'s programmers, picking up tips and hints on programming and getting a feel for the type of games they wanted.

Six months passed, and then *MOVIE* arrived in **Ocean**'s offices. The game was snapped up, and now appears on the **Imagine** label. Dusko Dimitrijevic should be able to afford return tickets in future . . .

MOVIE is based on a New York gangster theme, and puts you in the shoes of a Philip Marlowe type character. You're a private detective who's been hired to recover an audio tape from a gangster's headquarters. First, you have to find a girl, who will lead you to the mob's base — but to make life that bit more difficult she has a dead ringer, a twin sister no less! The bad sister spells trouble, with a capital T. The first major task in the game is to find the right twin, then it's a matter of following her and protecting her from harm on the way to the Boss's hideout.

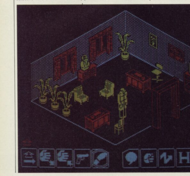
Set in the Big Apple, the game begins with your character in an office. Suddenly, business becomes rather brisk so you decide it's time to leave, and take a closer look at the neighbourhood. Along the bottom of the screen there's a row of icons used to control the trenchcoated private detective. Pressing the fire button puts the icon selecting cursor under the control of joystick and keyboard — anot her press on fire selects an icon. At the start of the game the cursor rests over the Move icon — a footprint — and it's possible to move in four directions around the room you're in. All the locations are monochromatic, presented in the three dimensional view that has become familiar with **Ultimate**'s releases, and games such as *Fairlight* and *Sweevo*.

Some of the objects found in locations can be moved around — like chairs and tables. Others can be picked up and dropped using the appropriate icon, or even thrown about. As you follow the girl, she'll ask you do things for her, or fetch things, like a whisky. Bottles and bags come in handy when your guide needs bribing!

High on the list of priorities for any self respecting gumshoe is a gun. Once you've found one, the Gun icon comes into play, and a row of bullets appears above it. Each time a shot is fired a bullet disappears from the display. At last you can waste baddies but once the ammo runs out all you can do is hurl the weapon at a baddie's head. Then it's time to find another gun in double quick time!

The playing area encompasses several buildings, interlinked by streets in which dustbins and packing cases, as well as the odd telephone booth, can be found. The mob realise what you are up to, and heavies lurk in some locations waiting to give you a bad time. Some just punch — and using the Punch icon, you can fight back — while others pack a mean shooter. Getting too close to a bullet spells curtains, and your trenchcoated figure dissolves before the game returns to the start screen.

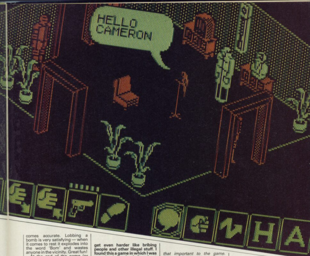






As an aid to communication, the Speech icon allows conversation by inflating a speech bubble above the figure of the Private Investigator. Type in what you have to say, and consider it said. The other characters in the game won't accept direct orders but can be friendly, in fact sometimes downright helpful after, a bit of verbal. (Oh and don't be tempted to make improper suggestions to the mini-skirted girls — they reject your advances.) Some of the doors are guarded, and you'll need to pop the password into a speech bubble to get through. It's possible to guess some of the passwords, but persuading the girl or other characters to let you have passwords is an important part of the game.

As you collect useful items, they appear in an area of the screen above the icons. A cursor points at your latest acquisition and if you want to throw something, make sure the cursor (controlled by its own icon) is pointing at the right missile. Sometimes you need to lob objects at things in a room so they can be moved within reach. The zigzag Throw icon sends missiles bouncing round the room, and a little practice is needed before throwing be-



comes accurate. Lobbing a bomb is very satisfying — when it comes to rest it explodes into the word 'Bom' and wastes anyone in the vicinity. Great fun!

At the end of the game (or after quitting with the A icon), two scores are presented. One score indicates the number of rooms visited as a percentage of the total number of locations in the game. The other, on a scale from 0.00 to 0.99, indicates how many tasks you have completed during play. And remember it ain't easy being a detective, especially in the Big Apple.

CRITICISM

1 ***MOVIE*** **is a very original game and definitely deserves a bit of investigating to see how good it is. Of course there is the obvious comparison with** ***Alien 8*** **but** ***MOVIE*** **is a much better game which allows the player to be much more involved with the plot of the game. Although the game has a bit of mystery about I felt that some of the intrigue has been lost on account of the relatively bright colours used.** ***MOVIE*** **does let you stomp about the city streets but you must be very careful where you tread — you could be stuck down an alley with a gun in your back on the turn of corner. Finding the girl is pretty hard in itself but after that the problems get even harder like bribing people and other illegal stuff. I found this a game in which I was completely involved after about ten minutes play.**

2 This is quite an unusual game for the Amstrad. You play the hero, of course, and have to go around killing gangsters and generally acting mega cool. The graphics are a bit blocky in places but otherwise this is an excellent game. The only sound is spot FX but these are good. Definitely one of the best games this month and everyone should go out to the shops, dig into their moth ridden wallets and purses, and buy it!

3 *Though presented in the once amazing but now ubiquitous 3D format,* MOVIE *really is quite good and has an air of originality. The graphics are quite neat with a style of their own: even if they are a bit blocky, they are very atmospheric and reminiscent of the era portrayed. What is most impressive about* MOVIE *is how well though out the product is. The icon system works very well and the only criticism is its slight sluggishness when entering into combat. Sound is a bit lousy, though it's not really all that important to the game. Overall* MOVIE *really is a bit of a stunner and is a decent continuation of Imagine's now rather respectable Amstrad range.*

Presentation 91%
Evocative inlay artwork, nicely done all round.

Graphics 90%
Clever and atmospheric, if a little blocky.

Sound 65%
The only let down about the game — fortunately not too important.

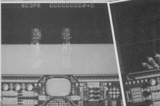
Playability 92%
Move over Sam Spade, Dick Tracey and Phil Marlowe, this game is fun!

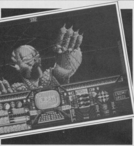
Addictive qualities 92%
Give it about ten minutes and you're hooked.

Value for money 91%
A little expensive, maybe, but par for the course.

Overall 91%
An original idea, neatly executed. The Yugoslavian Connection hits home.

GLASS





Quicksilva, £8.95 cass
Author: Gary Ireland

CRITICISM

1 This game is dull — it boils down to being a three screen shoot em up, and even then the screens are dull and predictable. Graphically the game is quite pretty but its sonics and playability are sadly lacking. Even if you're a shoot em up fan you'll more than likely be disappointed with this one.

2 On the Spectrum *Glass* was quite playable but the Amstrad version really shows how boring the game is. The basic idea is just too basic — just shoot everything up. No thought is required, the baddies come to you and shooting them is much, much too simple for my liking. The only impressive part is the graphics, these are very detailed and bounce up and down quite fluently. Colour is put to good effect with a whole palette on show all the time. Best is when you travel through the big blocks trying to avoid them, these are drawn very well and can move quite fast at times. The sound is about as exciting as the game itself. Even the most novice of arcade freaks will find this game gets boring very quickly.

3 GLASS is another boring shoot em up but with a subtle difference — it's VERY boring even though it has some of the nicest shoot em up graphics around. The display of the ship is neat and a great use has been made of the limited Amstrad colours. Unfortunately there isn't much to it to keep you on the edge of your seat wanting to know what will happen next. I felt that there must be something else to this game but couldn't find it anywhere.

The name of this program might lead you to think that it's about the stuff that you look through, polish and throw stones through. Well it's not. In the gospel according to Quicksilva *Glass* is trouble. You see, the goodies have a big problem on their hands — the evil enemy have built three cities on the plains of Glass and this trio of sprawling conurbations pose the gravest threat to the survival of the goodies since goodness knows when.

So, it's up to you to save the day, and swiftly climbing into a Star Fighter Training Machine you begin your quest to destroy the enemy. Once you're strapped firmly into the seat the simulator can begin. The object of the game is to blast your way through the many screens, breach the city's radar defence system and completely destroy the pseudo-conscious Metalliks (they're the enemy). What a job! The simulator is a pretty souped up little number and contains all the gadgets to allow you to complete your task. Taking up about three quarters of the screen is the window which shows what's going on outside (what else?) and underneath it is the cockpit display area. On it are shown the vital functions of the simulator which are: a direction pointer showing which way you're currently going, shield and time bars which both decrease as the game goes on and when enemy missiles finds their target respectively and a video screen which prints up any incoming messages.

There are fourteen levels each containing five types of screens so quite a bit of work is needed before your training is complete. Each screen has a time limit and you have to survive until the clock runs down. The first screen pits you against a load of marauding nasties, they're not too violent, though, and walk along the horizon occasionally lobbing the odd missile at you. Moving left and right and firing when they're in your sights should dispose of them. When the time limit runs down you're transported to the next screen where you have to do battle with a series of evil flying creatures. These come from over the horizon and head straight towards you. If they're not killed before they reach you they'll knock a couple of points off your shield.

The screen following is a dodge em affair where you have to carefully steer your way through a 3D landscape jam packed with towers. Hitting a tower depletes your shield but extra points are given if you manage to avoid them. Successful negotiation of that screen plonks you in a head to head battle with enemy tanks. These emerge from over the horizon, fire an accurate missile at your ship and retreat back from whence they came. To survive the screen you have to either dodge the tanks entirely or shoot them before they fully emerge from over the horizon and let rip a deadly volley.

The final screen is different from the rest. A great fat spaceship scrolls across the screen and you have to shoot off its various appendages, radar dishes and the like. Completing this screen automatically moves you up a level and you tackle the next set of screens.

When your shield finally runs out the game terminates and you're given a rating on your performance varying from 'Terminal Wally' to the ultimate rating 'Game Lord'.

Control keys: Left — O, Right — P, Up — Q, Down — A, Fire — Space

Presentation 67%
Slick with lots of colourful presentation.

Graphics 79%
Lots of large and detailed colourful characters.

Sound 36%
A few spot FX but generally disappointing.

Playability 50%
Almost too easy to play.

Addictive qualities 49%
Easy to get into and even easier to get out!

Value for money 56%
Overpriced for what the game entails.

Overall 57%
Basic shoot em up with lots of nice graphics.


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ZOIDS

Martech, £8.95 cass, £12.95 disk



warlike race inhabited the planet Zoidstar, building complex fighting machines, Zoids, which eventually allowed them to defeat all their enemies in battle. Once the potential for real war was over, the organic life forms developed androids to control their Zoids and one-on-one battles were fought for the entertainment of the populus. Then a freak meteor storm destroyed all living organisms, leaving only immensely powerful fighting machines controlled by sophisticated androids to inherit the planet.

A standby Zoid battleforce patrolling a far flung galaxy attempted to return to Zoidstar after the meteor storm with the intention of recolonising the planet, but their transport ship crashed on Zoidstar's cold Blue Moon. Only the Zoids survived, and they soon discovered that the freezing temperatures on the moon meant they'd have to redesign themselves . . . and thus the Red Zoids were formed, gaining their colour from the heat which they radiate.

The Red Zoids learnt how to operate as a unified fighting force and decided to return to the Zoidstar and completely destroy the old breed of Blue Zoids. Red Zoid battle squadrons were made ready and the attack followed.

The few Blue Zoids that survived the initial onslaught regrouped and set about building a new Blue Zoid they called Zoidzilla; the ultimate fighting machine, capable of challenging the might of the leader of the Red Zoids, Redhorn the Terrible. The Zoid war raged.

Then a small and insignificant space craft plunged into the struggle, crashlanding on Zoidstar. A Blue Zoid patrol was the first to reach the wreckage and it picked up a humanoid survivor who was to become known as The Earthman. He soon became skilled in the art of Zoidthought, the means by which a pilot communicates with the Zoid which carries him — indeed he proved to be a fearless and cunning adversary, better than an android when in control of a Zoid.

The Earthman drew up a plan which, if successful, would win the war for the Blue Zoids. He volunteered to merge minds with the mighty Zoidzilla and be transported to the middle of the Red Zoid city complex with the aim of destroying all their bases and factories.

Disaster struck — as the Blue Zoid spacecraft containing Earthman and Zoidzilla descended, a missile struck it destroying the craft and scattering pieces of Zoidzilla over the landscape. The Red Zoids recovered the six pieces of Zoidzilla and buried them under six different city domes. With the Earthman presumed dead and with the loss of their mightiest fighting machine, the Blue Zoids seemed doomed . . .

All was not lost, however. The Red Zoids failed to spot a small





YOUR CURRENT ZOID

ZOIDTHOUGHT
The Zoidthought display shows the state of mind of the Zoid. Apparently with practice this signal can be interpreted.

STATUS Icon
Select information to be displayed in the STATUS DISPLAY area.

GUNS Icon
This is automatically selected by the Zoid if it comes under fire. When the icon is selected a window emerges showing the incoming missiles. A "3D Perspective Enhancer" is overlayed to help you aim the gun and shoot down the missiles before they strike you. Each missile that hits home adds ten percent to your damage.

ZOID ID Icon
Identifies Red Zoids. When the icon is selected the map switches to short range and a cursor appears. Move this over whatever you want to identify, press fire and two windows emerge from the icon, one showing a picture of the Zoid under examination and the other gives a few brief words of description.

MOVE Icon
Used to move your Zoid around the planet. The map goes into long range mode, and a cursor appears over your Zoid's location. Move the cursor to the place where you want your Zoid to go and press fire. It then follows the course dictated by the cursor automatically (unless it senses danger on the way) allowing you to concentrate on other Zoid functions.

MISSILES Icon
Launches camera-equipped missiles. The map switches to short range and once your target has been selected with the cursor another window emerges showing the flightpath of the missile as seen through the camera. During flight you have control over a missile's left/right trajectory, and you have to guide the missile past obstacles to its target. A window with a mushroom cloud appears on detonation.

THE STATUS DISPLAY
This displays the condition of vital functions — ammunition remaining (missiles and bullets), power, damage sustained and tells you how many pieces of Zoidzilla have been collected.

SCANNER Icon
Scans your immediate vicinity for objects on or just under the ground, namely pieces of Zoidzilla and Zoidar power pods. The power pods play a vital function in the game, providing extra energy and ammunition. Sometimes, when you destroy a city dome a power pod can be found in the wreckage. Look for them!

INFORMATION Icon
Works like the Zoid ID icon, except it can be used to call up information on installations — city domes, mines and radio beacons.

THE MAP WINDOW
This shows an aerial view of the locality and has two magnifications — long range and short range. The long range map shows all the features of the landscape and is used when planning the route for your Zoid to take — move the cursor to where you want to be and your Zoid will travel there, providing it doesn't find hazards on the route.
The short range map shows your immediate vicinity, with you placed at the centre. In this mode the map also shows whether there are any Red Zoids in the locality. As your Zoid moves, the map scrolls.

RADIO BASE Icon
This plays an important part in the game since it allows you to radio your home base and dictate instructions. Using this you can request a missile strike on a Red Zoid installation. The missiles usually take around half a minute to reach their target but are very effective and never miss.
The other function of this icon is to contact home base and tell them the location of a piece of Zoidzilla if you find one. When you do, a spaceship is beamed down to pick up the piece and your Zoid is automatically upgraded to a more powerful model. The background colour of your display window changes and a new Zoid name appears at the top. The order is Spiderzoid, Scorpozoid, Trooperzoid, Tank, Great Gorgon — finally Zoidzilla himself.

Spiderzoid scuttling away from the wreckage . . . it contained the Earthman. You.

You begin the game in that Spiderzoid, your mind merged with the machine's consciousness and in control of its functions (annotated on the main picture). Your mission is to roam the planet, entering the Red Zoid city complexes in order to collect the six pieces of Zoidzilla. Each time you collect a segment of the mighty machine, your Zoid is upgraded to a more powerful, stronger machine until finally, with all six pieces in your possession, you can to merge minds with Zoidzilla. Then you must seek out Redhorn the Terrible and do battle.

There are ten Red Zoid strongholds, each containing a number of cities, a mine, a powerplant and a distress beacon. The domed cities are guarded by Slitherzoids and contain other, more powerful Red Zoids which will be released upon you. Spending too long in one stronghold is dangerous — the distress beacon summons Redhorn and Mammoth the Des troyer. If you remain in one place too long, life gets very short!

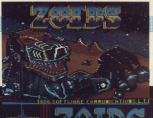
Remember, you are not in control of your Zoid — you have merged minds with it, and use the keyboard or joystick to operate the interface between your mind and the mind of the machine. When you use the icons, windows pop onto the main display, in the same way as thoughts pop into your mind. Heed them. Occasionally your Zoid will not do exactly as it is told — it is programmed to survive if at all possible.

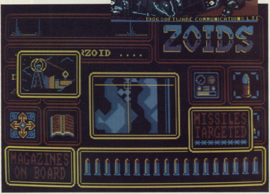
The game position can be saved out to avoid mega long playing sessions — but remember that the game can't be saved if your Zoid feels threatened . . .

CRITICISM

Zoids **is without doubt pure brilliance. It is loads of fun to play, very ad dictive and well presented. Although icon driven games can cause problems,** *Zoids* **is easy to control. It is a pity they could not fit a tune in — music would have really put the icing on the cake. On the inlay it says 'the battle begins'. I just hope the follow up will be as good as this! There are a few games around with better graphics and one or two which have amazing features, but this one, with its sheer depth of game and fabulous on-screen presentation, overshadows them all. The objective of the game seems pretty simple, but actually achieving the task requires both arcade skills and strategy. The program offers a huge challenge, but the task it throws down is by no means an impossible one, it just requires a lot of patience, learning and experimentation.**

ZOIDS





2 What a superb game! A whole Zoid environment has been crammed into the Amstrad with road networks, cities and the social infrastructure of its robotic inhabitants. The icon system is a joy to use and the whole game has been exceptionally well thought out. The graphics are brilliant and the way the windows emerge and have things happening in them is ace. There's so much happening it's all to easy to become totally involved in the game. If you're an arcade adventure player, a strategist or an arcade freak, then go out and buy this — it has aspects of all three types of games! Don't miss it.

3 Zoids *is a masterpiece of programming. The use of colour is exceptional and the graphics are superb. The noises started to get on my nerves after a while but the game itself is very good. The windowing and the way everything shakes after an explosion, and all the other nice touches, add up to make the game a real classic; one that certainly rates among my top Amstrad games. Go and get it!*

Presentation 93%
Good scenario, but it's up to you to find out how to win!

Graphics 92%
Neat icons, lovely windowing system

Sound 74%
The buzzes can get a bit annoying and a tune would have been great

Playability 94%
Icons make it easy to get going but there's a fair bit of brain strain involved

Addictive qualities 95%
Once you get going it's difficult to stop

Value for money 93%
A great game at a fair price.

Overall 93%
A masterpiece that should be in every Amster's collection.

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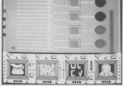
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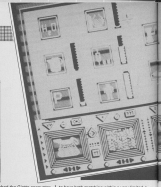
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THE COMET GAME

Firebird, £7.95 cass
Author: Andrew Glacester





CRITICISM

1 I suppose this is Firebird's bid to be topical and trendy. I wonder who they bought the rights off? Tacky marketing aside, THE COMET GAME isn't as awful as it could have been apart from a few yucky gameplay points. The main nasty bit is the lives system, one little slip on a sub-game and the whole thing's over. It's very easy to mess up and the game soon becomes very frustrating indeed. To look at COMET is very pretty indeed and has some very nice effects in it though all in all it's a bit of a let down for the Hot Range. Hopefully Firebird will pull their act together.

2 Well I suppose if anybody had to bring out a comet game it had to be Firebird. The games that it contains are fairly original in themselves but none of them are really any fun to play. My favourite part was the coffee game but after a while this joined the other four sections in being very boring. When on the comet I got bored just shooting away endlessly at germ bags and found that after a while the game got almost impossible to play. The presentation is excellent and good use is made of the vector graphic routines. *The Comet Game* could have been improved vastly by having more of a game to play, unfortunately what you've got is a good exterior but not much inside.

3 I did not enjoy playing this game at all. The graphics are poor and there is nothing really exciting about it. There is hardly any sound and what there is really lets down the software industry. A comparison with some of the games currently on the market makes you wonder what Firebird are up to. One game, I'm afraid, that is easy to forget.

Well you watched the Giotto encounter with Halley's Comet and saw the pictures looking exactly like a British Gas logo and you listened and listened to Patrick Moore drone on and on and learned that comets are really just dirty snowballs whizzing inertly through outer space. Well, that was all a complete lie. Though you may not know it comets are dangerous entities that harbour nasty bacteria. Flying through the infinite at 20,000 mph would make anyone nasty and nasty is exactly what the germs living on the comet are. Aeons of having a terrible time stuck out in interplanetary space have made them very toxic indeed and as an extension of their toxicity they've decided to make *The Comet* crash into earth. There the little germs could have a really good time infecting flora and fauna right, left and centre, making mankind extinct and taking over the planet. Since this bacteria's discovery Domestos only kills 99% of all known germs dead. To stop the little agar eaters' wicked plan a spaceship has been constructed with a human crew of one, this person is an extremely good shot and once rendezvous with Comet has been achieved he must blast the germies into oblivion.

The Comet Game places the player in place of the ship's computer flying towards Comet city and trying to cope with all the hassles and niggles that arise on the ship during the journey. Luckily the human germ zapper is in hibernation so the computer doesn't have to do anything really tricky like choose the in—flight movie or play chess to entertain the silly primate. What problems do arise are each treated as a game and there are six of them. They are as follows:

COMPUTER ARGUMENT

Every now and again certain circuits within the machine get into a bit of a tizz. Luckily the diagnostic circuits soon detect any irregularity but the computer has to put it right. Pete Computer (PC) is given a test response and must calibrate the faulty circuitry. The test repsonse is shown on a row of LEDs with varying rows and patterns of ON/OFFs on the far left of the screen while the circuitry's result is shown on its four LEDs at the right hand side. The idea is to have both matching within a very limited amount of time.

INTERPLANETARY SAFEGUARD

Some silly planetary government has left its meteor defence system active. When the comet bashing craft comes in range of a rock detection zone a whole squad of ABMs are sent off to destroy the offending intruder. You're in the centre and all around are the approcahing missiles shown as lines. A cursor controls a sight and fire sends off a missile that explodes at the cursor point. It's all very similar indeed to the now ancient *Missile Command*.

ANTENNA ALIGNMENT

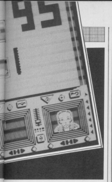
From time to time the ship's AE35 unit misaligns, breaking essential contact with Earth. A screen pops into view showing a dish receiver from a side view plus a signal strength meter. In the upper right hand side of the main playing window there's the ubiquitous down-counter. This part of *The Comet Game* really is rather simple. Use left and right to rotate the dish and when the signal strength gets to its most powerful press fire. Failure to align results in a nasty and particularly gory death.

LIFE SUPPORT INFESTATION

The nasty little germs prove to be more trouble than ever expected and more often than not manage to get into the oxygen lines supplying the human crew's life support. A defence system is supplied and the horrid little amoebas have discovered a way of avoiding it. Less subtle methods have to be employed with the aid of the in-ship laser system. Using a four directional cursor the bouncing germs have to be zapped before getting inside the crew compartment. The countdown quickly descends to doom and if all Domestos proof demons are zapped before zero then this section is safe.

COFFEE GAME

This is perhaps the most important of all,



from here the crewman has his coffee injected into the life support. A coffee free crew member is, according to Firebird, a dead crew member. There are a number of factors to take into account to keep the flow of caffeine constant including the emptying of the sleeping human's bladder. A cursor can zoom over a whole batch of icons on screen using fire to activate/deactivate them. Each icon has a histogram showing its respective status and if any overflow then the game is over.

A lot of the time is spent in the main screen where a view of the distant comet is shown as a starfield whizzes by. Every now and again one of the above emergencies arise and it's up to the ship's computer to solve it. Failure results in YOU LOST being splashed flashily over the screen and you have to start again. After each complete emergency the comet gets nearer until finally . . . yes, the germies come into view, the frozen crew member is awakened and it's off for a stint of zapping over the comet surface. Succeed and glory, fortune and chat show appearances are yours. Die and your planet's dead too in which case it doesn't seem likely that anyone is going to admire you very much at all.

Presentation 70%
Good packaging and reasonably attractive on-screen appearance.

Graphics 76%
Nice use of vector graphic routine but nothing else is extra special.

Sound 20%
Not a lot

Playability 61%
The game can become very frustrating if you stay with it.

Addictive qualities 56%
The coffee might be more addictive.

Value for money 60%
Average price for a below average game.

Overall 62%
Rainbird can do better than this!

SAMANTHA FOX STRIP POKER



Martech, £8.95 cass, £13.95 disk
Author: Chris Fayers



SAM FOX STRIP POKER

Software reviewer, Dominic Handy, really enjoys his work, especially when there is the opportunity to tackle Sam Fox at strip poker. As the sequence shots show he plays a mean game of poker.

CRITICISM

1 Martech have produced quite a good little poker game and it has the added bonus of having digitised pictures of Sam Fox's lumpy body to reward you when you're doing well. The big niggle about the game is the speed that it plays. It would have been a little nicer if you could speed up the proceedings somewhat. Nevertheless it's a fun game, although the novelty does wear off pretty quickly.

2 Martech have made their name over the past couple of year's with good games released on many computers that involved licensed personalities. The *Geoff Capes' Strongman Challenge* was quite good, although this time around, I would have preferred to have seen more go into what could've been an excellent poker simulation rather than to rely upon Sam Fox's obvious selling points. Although very little moves on screen, cards flash as they are dealt and some of the colours used are garish and difficult to read. I find the screen shots of Sam stripping completely superfluous to what is fundamentally a very good simulation but with a minority appeal. Essentially a game for which hardened stud players should find the ante.

3 Although I do not have a great deal of knowledge of poker I still found this game very enjoyable. The main point of the game, of course, is to get Sam Fox's clothes off and that has to be quite an incentive for any male wishing to play this and learn the game at the same time! The graphics and colour are not brilliant but otherwise it's a good game and it certainly had me glued to the screen! Although I enjoyed it I think any experienced poker player would find it too slow. Still nothing is perfect.

You've ogled at her pictures, watched her on television, and listened to her record. Now play her at strip poker. Well, it's not really Sam Fox, but your humble Amstrad which plays the game and supplies pictures of the chesty page three girl. Samantha Fox Strip Poker plays you at the classic Seven Card Stud poker game. Both you and the computer start with 999 credits apiece and you must win as many points as you can by betting on your cards. Every time you reduce the computer's points by one hundred you are rewarded with a digitised picture of Sam Fox taking her clothes off, starting with her gloves at 900 points then the rest of her clothing piece by piece . . . If she starts winning back the lost points then her clothing is retrieved and if you start losing points then she starts ordering *you* to take your clothes off, whether you comply or not is another matter!

The game is controlled by two keys — one to choose the options presented after a dealing and the other to select it. The game is made foolproof by the computer referee who only gives the options relevant for that go, eliminating any mistakes which could otherwise be made.

For the uninitiated, seven card stud is a game where the player has to try to make the best hand possible out of the seven cards dealt, the best hand winning the 'pot'. When a hand starts the player is dealt three cards, the third being dealt face upwards so your opponent can see it. From these three cards you must decide whether to *pass* (throw them in) *check* (keep your cards but not bet) or *bet*. The betting continues until either a player *calls* or both players *check*. When that happens a further card is dealt and the betting continues. If you have what you think is a good hand then you can up the stakes by *raising*. The game follows this pattern until all seven cards have been dealt, then the betting continues until a player *calls*, then both hands are shown and the best hand winds the pot. Throughout a hand there is the option to *pass* and other relevant options can be chosen if desired.

On the 'B' side of the cassette is an added bonus. No Sam Fox, but a four player seven card stud poker game. The rules are the same but here you can play against up to three computer opponents. In this game there are another two options — *auto* where the computer takes a decision for you and *demo*, very useful if you're new to poker and want to see what the game is about (try playing two computer players against one another).

Control keys:

Presentation 69%
Of a reasonable standard but nothing special.

Graphics 61%
Could have been a lot better.

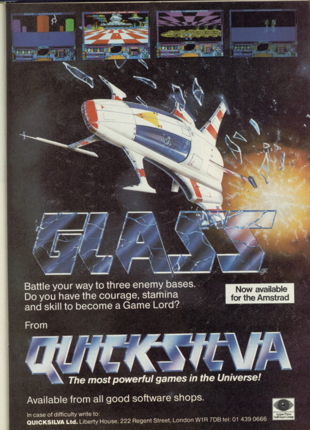
Sound 73%
Theme from The Sting precedes screen shots of Sam otherwise just beep tone.

Playability 71%
Even if you're not an expert at cards it's relatively easy to play.

Addictive qualities 65%
Quite addictive initially but once you've uncovered Sam the addiction wears thing.

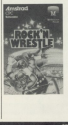
Value for money 66%
Average price for an average game.

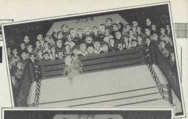
Overall 68%
A novelty game which is played too slowly for any expert cardsharp. Nevertheless it has its good points.

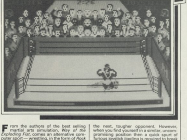

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ROCK N WRESTLE

Melbourne House, £9.95 cass







CRITICISM

1 Oh dear Melbourne House seem to have made a bit of a mess of ROCK N WRESTLE and got a game that has very bad playability and lots of podgy graphics. I suppose at least we've got some crowd in the Amstrad version — but they don't help to enhance the game one bit. The sound effects are very 'crush and crunchy' but unfortunately the characters suffer from a bad problem of obesity and sort of wobble around the screen. On hitting the ropes I expected to bounce off smoothly but what happened was a very bad stutter of the ropes as they tried to give you the impression of bending. I'm afraid even on the finished version the game still had 'bugs' — for instance sometimes I found myself suddenly losing a leg, and a few seconds later I got it back again — not so good eh!

2 I can not call this one of Melbourne House's best games, in fact it's very bad indeed. Its only redeeming quality is the graphics, they are not too bad at all. There is very little interest even to a wrestling fan. Some of the movements are quite well programmed but it is basically a poor game not worth considering.

3 Being an avid fan of Saturday afternoon wrestling bouts I was looking forward to playing this game from Melbourne House but after reviewing it I have to confess it will never find a place in my collection. I'll stick to the television programmes instead! The graphics are quite good and some of the movements are well worked out but everything else was pretty dull. I wonder why they could not have included some slim wrestlers. They all look like Giant Haystacks, fat and ugly!

From the authors of the best selling martial arts simulation, *Way of the Exploding Fist*, comes an alternative computer sport — wrestling, in the form of *Rock 'n Wrestle*. As grapple supremo, Gorgeous Greg (a reflection, perhaps, on the names of the main programmer Gregg Barnett or the graphics designer Greg Holland) you must battle your way past hardened opponents, the nine top rated wrestlers in the world, each with their own distinctive style, to become grappling champion of the planet. Or, if the mood takes you, there is a two player option so you can tumble and scuffle with a handy friend.

There are 24 different wrestling manoeuvres at your disposal, including such things as body slams, back breakers, piledriver and elbow drop. All are accessible from a single joystick (or set of keys if you're so inclined), although only four moves are available at any time, depending upon the situation since the computer 'intelligently' decides upon what move you need. For example, at the beginning of a bout you can't do anything other than 'soften up' your opponent by either grabbing, kneeing, kicking or 'punching' him. When your opponent is held within Greg's arms then the set of moves available changes.

You start with a limited amount of energy (represented by a bar at the bottom of the screen), as does your opponent, and this decreases with every assault. Once you've got your man firmly within your grasp he can be headbutted, lifted (energy permitting) and eventually picked up and thrown about the ring. Then, when he is sufficiently stunned, you can jump on him and attempt to pin him to floor for 3 seconds, success resulting in a win and a confrontation with the next, tougher opponent. However, when you find yourself in a similar, uncompromising position then a quick spurt of furious joystick jiggling is required to break the hold.

Each bout is well and truly finished once two falls are obtained from your sweaty assailant though this is by no means an easy task. If, however, your opponent is vanquished into a lump of humiliated muscle and leotard then the next attacker is dragged to the ring. Logicallly enough as time goes on the baddies get nastier and nastier. Really adept grappling gamesters should be able make it to world champion status but only after bashing the awesome line up of fatty fighters.

Presentation 55%
Colourful packaging.

Graphics 64%
Probably the only redeeming quality of this game.

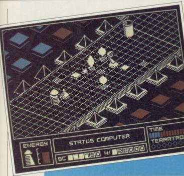
Sound 48%
Crunchy sound FX.

Playability 47%
Very few people will play it twice.

Addictive qualities 49%
It is too dull to be addictive.

Value for money 50%
An overpriced inferior game.

Overall 50%
An ordinary game with no redeeming features



ALIEN HIGHWAY



Vortex, £8.95 cass, £13.95 disk

After the evil and thoroughly nasty, but in the end utterly thwarted, invasion of earth (see *Highway Encounter*) it was decided that something had to be done about the alien aggressors apart from send them back to their home world with a sore bottom. The plan was to send off a Vorton to attack and destroy the industrial heart of the alien attackers home planet. Once blasted and blitzed the poor little offworlders won't have known what's hit them and will be in no mood at all to come bothering mother earth again. To accomplish such a feat some very powerful type of weapon would be needed and that's what has been made. It is the most totally and utterly awesome destructive device ever created by mankind, it is called the Terratron and it looks like an executive toy!

A Vorton, one of the original alien thwarters, is placed on the road to bug eyed industry city and must make his way to road end. Along the street there are a total of seven regeneration stations that are placed at inconvenient positions. The Terratron must be pushed through this energy dump to pump it up to peak condition for blasting away the main city centre.

The Vorton is in your control and looks a bit like a stumpy Dalek. For moving this robotic chap around there are four controls: accelerate, decelerate, rotate anti-clockwise and rotate clockwise. Since the Vorton hasn't got any hands he can't wear a digital watch or carry the terratron. He hasn't got any arms either so if he did have a watch he wouldn't be able to see it anyway. As for the Terratron the Vorton has to push it along as it sits upon the road surface. Not being made of something a bit slippier than tarmacadam, pushing around the ultimate weapon is not really that hard but it does decrease the maximum speed that Varney Vorton can hack at.

Though the Vorton is a pretty tough chap he's not immune to the nasties that infest the highway, they beetle back and forth and harass any non—alien entity they may find. There are two types of nasty to be encountered, one mindlessly meanders while the other, deadliest of the two, actually actively homes in upon your humble self. If an alien happens to bash upon Varney's casing energy saps away from his limited supply. Let the energy get to zero and the Varney becomes one of the dearly departed ready to be entered into the high score table.

The display format is a bit similar to the game's predecessor *Highway Encounter*, the screens flip between each other each edge is reached and the screens are shown in a isometric type view. The three dimensional effect is similar to that in *Alien 8* and other such games.

Presentation 80%
Concise clear instructions.

Graphics 88%
Tremendous graphics but opening screens could have been more colourful.

Sound 67%
The odd spot FX but nothing stimulating.

Playability 85%
Loads of fun from the word GO.

Addictive qualities 80%
One of those games that you'll want to play again and again.

Value for money 82%
Average price for a well above average game.

Overall 80%
A worthy successor to *Highway Encounter*.

CRITICISM

1

At first look I found that ALIEN HIGHWAY looked exactly like HIGHWAY ENCOUNTER and on playing the game I found everything else about it was much the same as well. The gameplay is very similar to it and graphics exactly the same, except there isn't the cute backgrounds. The game is different in parts, for example getting energized, and there is different control of the lives, but basically the game is just a rearrangement of H E. There is no mapping due to the random screens so this should be a harder game to play, but if you've got H E then I would not buy this too.

2

This is an excellent game from Vortex. Although it is in a similar vein to *Highway Encounter* this game is excellent. The graphics are verging on perfection and the game itself is no pushover. The screens early on are not amazingly colourful but still good. It is very addictive, almost like an adventure when you get deeper into the game and well worth persevering. I thought it was marvellous.

3

HIGHWAY ENCOUNTER was a great game and I was a great fan of it and still am. Now comes the follow up and I wondered if they could keep up the high standard. Well I am glad to say the answer is yes. Many people may think it is to much of a copy of the last but in fact quite a few extras have been added. Graphically it is very good but I think a bit more could have been made of the backdrops as it is a bit empty. A few more sprites have been added but the idea is still the same, you have to advance up the highway as far as possible and blow up the central complex. There isn't much of a new challenge but it is still fun. A great little game which is entertaining and fun to play.

AMTIX! COMPETITION

SOLVE A CRIME AND WIN YOUR OWN DETECTIVE OUTFIT IN ROBIN OF SHERLOCK COMPETITION



Something's afoot at Newsfield. Strange shadowy figures are abroad. The police are battering at the hallowed and dusty portals of Chateau AMTIX! and accusing fingers point in several directions.

Even the relative safety of the minion's broom cupboard has held no sanctuary from the misanthropic cries of Mr Liddon. The lounge lummox has even pointed his greasy digit in the direction of Uncle Malcolm's electronic bath chair. Liddon, for whom being called to the bar is a pleasure, is at a loss. For days now the self-styled barrister of AMTIX! has been bellowing the question that must be answered to appease the livid Londoner: **Who stole Liddon's lunch?**

Yes, only Liddon could have reacted to this minimal event with such a storming fury. Now he even resists our comradely cajoling to sit at our table in the *The Pig and Ball Bearings* for a pint of Old Flatulence and a pork pie, and has been seen struggling up the stairs under the weight of a Liddon Light Lunch, usually sported under the wrappings of a plain brown mail sack. He's so-o-o rude on the telephone that incoming calls are at an all time low.

We can't take this mis-marriage of justice anymore and neither can the people at CRL. They are prepared to offer a do-it-yourself detective kit to the first person who can solve the mystery and return the loverly Liddon to his normal self — after all they'd like to be able to phone us occasionally.

They're going to put into a large detective-type paper bag a disc camera, binoculars, a micro cassettte player, an alarm pen and a notebook with which to jot the comings and goings of suspicious characters.

What we need you to do is to don a deerststalker and with magnifying glass in hand, in less than 1500 words write a case for the prosecution with which Mr Liddon will get his man (or even possibly woman), and tell us how he goes about the task; the sleepless nights with endless tea-making and the final piecing together of the various clues that will provide him with the satisfaction he badly needs.

Once all the bits have been tied together into a watertight case, send your story and any exhibits which may strengthen your case to: **WHO NICKED LIDDON'S LUNCH, AMTIX!, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SY8 1AQ** to reach us by Tuesday, June 24 because we need to pacify him with something VERY SOON!



As an Amster you're probably not likely to overawed with Activision. A hit though Gh at time of writing, there've been no other Amstrad releases. Rumours, however, hav Activision, making them somewhat of a force in the Amstrad software scene. They've a few things up their sleeves, it would seem. Such claims could not really go uninvestigated and so it was very soon after that I (none other than GARY 'Scoop' LIDDON) found myself on a wet Friday morning braving the rigours of a train journey down to. . . .

ACTIVE

"It's bad that Amstrad owners seem to be treated as the second-rate citizens of the software world when they own what is undeniably a very powerful machine."



Andrew Wright

And what I found was . . . complete chaos.

Obviously this was the wrcng wet Friday to visit them, as they were right in the middle of transit to their new offices in Hampstead. A lot of people wandering about in a daze stuffing various bits of office equipment into tea-chests.

Well, since it's a profile I'm supposed to be doing it may be best to describe to describe Activision past before moving on to present and future.

PAST

Back in the dawn of history, in the years BC (Before Computers), when only spotty enthusiasts in back rooms had any idea of what was about to burst upon the home entertainment market, all there was available in terms of computing power were the numerous dedicated game consoles that floated around.

Most popular of these, despite it's £99.95 price tag, was the Atari VCS, a now feeble machine with blocky but colourful graphics and an extremely limited memory. Up until 1979 the production of game cartridges for the VCS was exclusively the prerogative of Atari. That all changed with the formation of Activision.

Four games designers — David Crane, Alan Miller, Bob Whitehead and Larry Caplan — were getting increasingly bored, feeling that their work was being stifled within the Atari corporation. They decided to break away and work for themselves. At the time, though a very large number of people owned VCS machines, software titles were few and far between, and limited in content. Since Atari had a monopoly over VCS software they had become complacent and it was possible for them to overcharge ridiculously for very average products. In Britain it was all too easy to spend £29.95 on what was usually a mediocrity. Still the public was happy as this was all it had seen — there were no releases of outstanding quality for comparison.

When Activision Inc was founded one of its major innovations was a pricing policy that seriously undercut any cartridge release from Atari. Another plus was the superior quality of its product, this a result of the designers' freedom to do what they wanted. With the VCS world at its feet, Activision went from strength to strength, selling worldwide enormous quantities of cartridge software. *Atari Pitfall* alone managed to clear four million units, an achievement as yet unparalleled within the home computer market.

Predictably enough, many companies collapsed through their failure to see that the days of the dedicated games console were numbered and it was the advance of the home computer that well and truly buried them. Quite sensibly, Activision spread its wings, quickly converting its large range of games for the Atari and Commodore computers as soon as they appeared. With many popular games designs behind them Activision soon made quite a dent, coming into a then young industry as veterans. It was around this time that the European market was also beginning to flourish and it was soon decided that the rest of the world should not be left out. In August 1983 Activision International went public, providing the necessary finance to set up Activision International Inc.

Offices were opened in the UK, France and Germany and despite being subsidiaries of the American parent firm, newly renamed Activision Domestic, the European offices were given the freedom any independent software house enjoys. There was also the advantage of having a large range of previous titles to convert onto European machines plus the readily saleable Commodore 64 versions.

Still, the European division was young in those days and many considered the marketing of all their games at £9.99 as a bit of a mistake. This was obviously a hangover from their American heritage as there it's none to unusual to pay exorbitant prices for a bog standard product. What's more, nearly all the American product was convert-

Ghostbuster undeniably was, it could hardly be described as breaking new ground and, ave wafted their way to AMTIX! Towers suggesting that things are soon to change at

CTIVISION

ed willy-nilly, whether or not it was suitable for the machine it was being converted onto. As a result such programs as Spectrum *Beamrider* found their to the general public at around the £10 mark.

As Activision slowly got used to how the European software market worked the first faltering steps towards competency were taken. The first real landmark was Activision UK's move to originate product as opposed to merely accepting what the yanks had to offer. *Tour de France*, written by Hungarian Andromeda Software, was the first attempt. After that came the now infamous *Ghostbusters* which was converted onto the Amstrad and made money despite the far from nice reception it enjoyed from most magazines. It's main asset was the fervour created by the Commodore 64 version which, along with the popularity of the film, probably sold the game for Activision.

PRESENT AND FUTURE

Now that the Amstrad is one of the top three computers Activision has decided, not surprisingly, to support the machine. The company has also decided that it would be wiser to originate games on the computer itself, rather than relying on conversions of tired VCS arcade games. There are with six titles planned for June alone. Most of the original stuff is being put through Electric Dreams, an Activision subsidiary headed by ex-Quicksilva boss Rod Cousens, while conversions seem to be headed under Activision. Rod was the man who was astute enough to snap up Amtix Accolade *Spindizzy*, an inspiringly original game by *Confuzion* author Paul Shirley.

A deal was recently struck up with French software house and distributor Loriciels. The Amstrad is now Frances top selling machine so it is attracting some fairly talented authors and Loriciels seem to be cornering the Gallic market. The first prog to be shipped across is *The Fifth Axis* — a review can be found elsewhere in this issue. Also underway are conversions of the immensely popular Lucasfilm games that Activision lucratively acquired the rights to. Most promising of all is *Eidolon*, an arcade adventure within a 19th century professor's mind which looks even more impressive than its 64 and Atari counterparts.

While he was packing what was once his office into small boxes I managed to snatch a few words with Andrew Wright, Activision's answer to Joanna Lumley. What role does he see Activision and the Amstrad playing in the future software market?

'As opposed to many other companies we no longer see the Amstrad as playing to the Spectrum and Commodore. The machine has become a real force in the software world, a force that for some reason many companies aren't taking full advantage of. It's bad that Amstrad owners seem to be treated as the second-rate citizens of the software world when they own what is undeniably a very powerful machine.

'As a counter to this all too predominant stance Activision via Electric Dreams has released *Spindizzy*, an Amstrad originated game, as well as *Tempest*, which,' adds Andrew, 'will only ever appear on the Amstrad.'

From a rather small four-person outfit, Activision has really grown up. Activision UK alone employs around 25 staff in its Hampstead headquarters, headed by managing director Hugh Rees Parnell. I asked Hugh if there would ever be any problem with Activision growing too large and suffering the lethargy which seems to be apparent within various other conglomerates.

Hugh thinks not: 'This won't happen. With Activision we have a central core that's a very efficient marketing and distribution force with a number of labels working with us. That's how we can maintain a big business that still retains the enthusiasm that can be found in so many small companies. We avoid the mistake of seeing our separate labels as mere channels to sell product through, each label has it's own staff, it's own personalities and as a result each label cares and feels for the product it releases'

As time goes by it looks likely that Activision will become one of the dominant forces in the industry. It does seem to look as if ultimately there will be very few computer entertainment companies, just lots and lots of different labels owned by a handful of controlling conglomerates. This seems to be the environment that Activision seem to be preparing for as various independents fall into its corporate wallet in both Europe and America. Doesn't this stifle future creativity somewhat?

"Creativity is probably our major advantage over many other software conglomerates. We can still innovate."



Hugh Rees Parnell

Andrew Wright disagrees, 'No, our product is sourced from all over the world. We will be distributing for a number of companies both in the states and Europe. Of most interest to AMTIX! readers is our relationship with Loriciels from which you'll see a number of outstanding Amstrad releases in the near future. Creativity will still exist within Activision because this is just the sort of thing that we are encouraging, it's probably our major advantage over many other software congloemrates. We can still innovate.'

Recently American adventuring demigods Infocom became part of the Activision continent. Quite good news for British adventure playing Amsters as the whole range of its games will soon be available in this country cheaper than the American import price. This, and many other factors, should make Activision a company to look out for in the future.

With that I departed, leaving Andrew to stuff the rapidly expanding and innovative Activision inside a cardboard box.

HELP OUR CRUMBLY EDITOR AND

WIN EITHER

AN AMSTRAD PCW 8256 OR CPC 6128 COURTESY OF AMTIX!

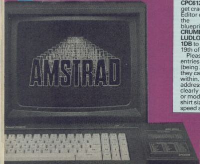
Have you ever noticed how people who are older than you always seem to know better? Take for example our very own 'I've been all around Europe kid!' Editor Malcolm. He used to be a motoring journalist when he was younger - well it was easier then, one forward gear, one reverse and be careful not to knock down the man in front with the red flag. Those were the happy days that Malcolm loved so well and relentlessly recounts to us from the driving seat of his 1956 executive bathchair whilst parked in the warmth of the Pig and Ball Bearings.

Well Malcolm keeps telling people how in those days when he yelled people jumped (especially the man with the red flag who retired with the world record for compound fractures). Problem is nowadays Malc no longer has the threat of instant death to add weight to his commands and reviewers idle in front of their word processors waiting for the next track to come on to the Ghetto Blaster. What Malcolm needs is an authority boosting device that he can wield from the comfort and safety of his steam driven C5 with which to spur the youthful lackies into some serious journalistic activity.



So, if you'd like to make an old man very happy and pick up an **AMSTRAD PCW8256** or a **CPC6128** for your trouble, then get cracking on the ultimate Editor enforcement kit and send the finished drawings/ blueprints or models to **HELP A CRUMBLY COMP, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB** to arrive here no later than 19th of June.

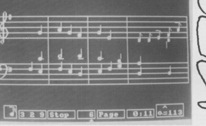
Please ensure that all your entries are no larger than A4 size (being 297mm x 210mm), but they can have several pages within. Print your name and address including postcode clearly on the back of all artwork or models along with your T shirt size (S-M-L) then we can speed any goodies to you!



AMTIX! COMPETITION

MEDIEVAL MINSTREL

JON 'LIBERACE' BATES lends an ear to Kuma's music utility and finds it falling slightly flat



Kuma's *Music Minstrel* is a music display editor. That means you can enter tunes on its graphic display using standard music notation, which can be stored and retrieved for later use.

It has the advantage of using all three voices of the CPC chip and displays and plays them simultaneously. It has an elephantine memory, storing up to 2400 three-note chords, which, if my fingers are working successfully, means about 7200 notes or about ten minutes worth of tune, depending how fast you've told it to perform. It presupposes a working knowledge of music notation so don't expect any help in that department.

On firing the program up, you can play its jolly demonstration tune, a piece of Johann Sebastian Bach's, which is both long and nearly accurate (sorry , lads, but I think you dropped a couple of clangers in the middle).

The working screen is well laid out with all facilities easy to access. The note value is in the bottom left window and can be altered by keys 8 or 2. The other command windows are accessed by zapping the pointer across the bottom of the screen. The notes are inserted on the staves by running the cursor symbol around the screen, and when the cursor is at the required point the copy key is depressed and the note appears and sounds.

TAKE IT AWAY, MOZART

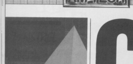
So, let's bung in our first tune. It seems to works OK. The manual is reasonably easy to follow but it would benefit from a quick reference guide as, for example, the instructions on note deletion are scattered about on different pages. If you decide to write in a particular key the relevant sharps or flats will be displayed quite competently, but you will not be told what key you are in.

The range of note values is pretty comprehensive from demi-semiquavers and triplet notes to dotted breves (that's fairly long.) However, that's your lot because you cannot tie notes together to form different lengths.

It seems if you want bar lines you have to put them in yourself. That's because there is no provision to insert a time signature. That immediately relegates the program to the second league. As there is no print facility available *Music Minstrel* is really a personal sketchpad and composing utility rather than a full -blown music utility.

Now let's enter the second voice. Change the relevant voice via the command window and start all over again. The screen still displays the part from voice one. Good, that saves having to remember what you did before. But, oh dear, I've tried to enter notes that are of shorter values than my melody. The notes won't align on screen and neither will they play back correctly. In fact, my nice piece of Mozart has been totally scrambled — at one point the tempo goes berserk and tries to catch up with itself. And now I'm getting only bits of the notes printed.

The program has obvious limitations and requires careful planning if you are going to enter parts with different but simultaneous note values. It copes well with chords but trying to put some moving inner parts again reduces the program to garbage. A shame.



CP/M

TURN UP THE VOLUME

The tone control only adds a low frequency oscillation to each voice in turn and could have done with a good deal more program space devoted to it, as the basic bleep of the chip is getting a little monotonous by now. However some degree of satisfaction can be gained from the ability to adjust the volume of each voice individually. This is pretty effective, so is the 'slur' feature which smooths off the hard attack, getting rid of that nasty click from each note — this is not a real legato phrasing as it would have you believe, though.

You can get it to repeat sections without having to retype but only by going through the boring and time consuming task of dumping on cassette and reloading — hardly well thought out. Music programs like this should have a lot more logical facilities to gain respect. The accelerando and crescendo facility is good if somewhat eccentric in operation, using multiple bar lines (!!?). In other words, if you are going to use music terms and signs then use them conventionally or not at all because it only serves to confuse.

EXTRANEOUS EXTRAS

The program boasts two useless facilities, one being a metronome which will only sound when the piece isn't playing. It tells you how fast it's going to be but you know that anyway from playing it through. And I would like to know why we need a clock. This tells me I have spent one hour 27 minutes using it. Wow.

The graphics are reasonable, although a wider colour choice would be welcome. The concept is fine but skimping on a lot of basic points has spoilt its performance and operation, especially when compared to Rainbird's *The Music System* or the Yamaha CX5 composing package.

Considering the rather high price *Music Minstrel* is a mite frustrating to use. A little more thought would have removed its eccentricities and made it quite versatile.

Music Minstrel is programmed by P Laidler and published by Kuma. It costs **£14.95 on cassette** and **£19.95 on disk.**

Sooner or later most micro users want to try their hands at wordprocessing. Once you have used, and become accustomed to, a good word processing system, you will probably turn your back on typewriters for ever.

The basic requirements for a wordprocessing system are provided by many programs. One of the oldest and best available for CP/M is that old faithful *Wordstar*. One of the advantages of a program as popular as *Wordstar* is that a huge amount of extra software support has been built up for it. *Wordstar* is still an excellent program, particularly as it is now available for the Amstrad for around £70.00.

The Amstrad version is called *Pocket Wordstar* and as far as I can tell is identical to the generic CP/M version. The version tested also came with an install program, useful if you ever have to change your hardware.

You might think that a program with as many features as *Wordstar* will do all that you will ever want. However as your proficiency grows you'll begin to find special requirements which cannot be provided by the basic program. In the case of *Wordstar* some of these extra requirements have been recognised and attempts made to fulfil them.

Mailmerge greatly extends the printing capabilities of *Wordstar* and also allows names and addresses or other data to be extracted from separate data files and merged into a form letter or document. Another add-on is *Spelstar*, a spell checking program. A more concerted effort to produce extra features has been made with the *Wordstar Professional* package, capable of producing footnotes and indexes for documents as well as providing extra conditional merge and print facilities.

Wordstar Professional is not yet available at a sensible price for the Amstrad. There are, however, many wordprocessing add-on programs available from the Public Domain. These can enhance your use of wordprocessing considerably. Let's look at a few of these programs.

FOOTNOTES AND INDEXING

If you are writing technical documents which contain embedded numbers, which refer to notes at the end of the page or document, an ideal program is FTNOTE, available on BOOG library volume 43. To insert a footnote reference number just insert a (££) in the main text, and at the bottom of the page put another (££) preceding the footnote. The program will automatically number these notes where the (££) characters appear. There is also an option to remove all the footnotes from the main document so they can be printed as a separate end-of-document reference sheet.

Another useful program for the technical writer is WINDEX. This program will produce an index of a list of keywords in a *Wordstar* document file with the number of the page on which they occur. The keywords can be entered direct from the keyboard or prepared beforehand and placed in a keywords file. This can save a lot of the hard work involved in producing a book index. WINDEX is available, along with some other *Wordstar* items on BOOG volume 53.

SPELLING CHECKERS

There seems to be a sad lack of these in the Public Domain, for CP/M anyway. The only one I could find was on US volume 80, but unfortunately this is written in a form of structured BASIC and would need modification to the source files (which are supplied) to make it work with some other version of BASIC.

WORDCOUNTERS

Writers and journalists often get paid by the word, and for someone in this line, these utilities are essential. There are quite a few word-counting programs in the Public Domain, one of the best being FREQ which can be found on UK volume 23. This program produces a list of the words used in the document and their frequency of use as a percentage of the total words, as well as a total count for each word and for the whole document.

This utility works well a spelling checker because typographical errors usually stand out as a single occurrence of a word. A less sophisticated but effective word-counter, called simply WC, which produces a count of the individual characters, words and lines in a document, can be found on BOOG volume 51 along with NULU described below.

ARCHIVING

If you write a lot of letters or small documents with a wordprocessor you will, sooner or later, find your disks full of numerous small files. This can be a nuisance as most disks allow only 64 or 128 directory entries and so, on an Amstrad disk, you could have 64 x 1K files and more than 100K left on the disk which you can't use.

Archiving is an answer to this. Library files are large composite files which contain a number of smaller files. They are more or less an exclusive to the Public Domain, as are the programs which produce them. The use of these can produce considerable savings in disk space.

NULU11 is a program which can create a library file, add files to it, and extract them again as needed. The only liability of all this is that once a file is in a library you cannot edit it; you have to extract it again to do anything with it. These library files are mainly of use for old or little used files which don't have to be edited too often.

TEXT FILE FILTERS AND CONVERTERS

Wordstar has two modes of operation, document and non-document. In document mode text can be righthand justified and page breaks are displayed, making it easier to produce a professional-looking document.

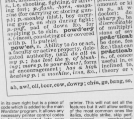
INCREASE YOUR WORD POWER

In his wanderings through the Public Domain Software Library, ROY JONES unearths some useful add-ons for that grandaddy of word processing packages, WORDSTAR

The trouble with files produced in this mode is that they contain characters which are not part of the normal ASCII character set. If such files are viewed on the screen by means of the CP/M built-in TYPE command they will probably not be displayed correctly. This usually shows up as bright blocks at the end of most words.

Nowadays it is quite common for writers to send their manuscripts on disk direct to the typesetter or publisher. Document mode files can cause problems in this situation as they may need extra editing or filtering before they can be used. The Public Domain is abundant with all kinds of filtering programs.

FILTW is a program to convert *Wordstar* document files into standard text files. Converting a non-document file into a document file so that it can be reformatted or righthand justified can also be done using a program called WSDOCON. Both of these programs are available on BOOG volume 43.


sprinkle with p., whiten (hair) or beautify (skin) thus, use p.; decorate with small spots. *p. & shot*, ammunition (*not worth p. & s.*, i.e. shooting, fighting, or striving for); *p.-flask, -horn, -magazine* (for carrying or storing gun-p.); *p.-monkey* (hist.), boy carrying gun-p. on ship during fight; *p.-puff*, pad of down &c. for applying p. to skin. **powd'ery** a. (*-iness*), consisting of or covered with p. [L *pulvis*]

pow'er, n. Ability to do or act, a faculty or active property, delegated authority, (*will do all in my p.*; *has lost the p. of blushing*; *more p. to your elbow!*, form of encouragement; *has a high heating p.*; *a machine, lens, &c.,*

improves one'... lately, not l... something); ... professional amount or ki... *in p.*, at w... doctor); de... (*sharp p.*, ba... *discreditable* of multiplyi... sions of sev... **prăc'ticab**... be done, fea... &c.) that can... **prăcticab**... a., of, conce... useful in, e... inclined to, theory or v...

ah, awl, oil, boor, cow, dowry; chin, go, bang, so,

PRINTING

Many printers have features and capabilities that cannot be easily used from *Wordstar*. A program which overcomes this problem is ANYCODE. It is not a program in its own right but is a piece of code which is added to the main *Wordstar* program. It allows any necessary printer control codes to be incorporated into your *Wordstar* file. This allows any of the special print modes to be used.

A simpler stand alone program is EPSON80. This program can be used to set the print mode of any Epson compatible printer. This will not set all the features but it will allow setting of the most common ones like italics, double strike, skip perf, compressed, emphasized, double width etc. Both of these programs can be found on KUG volume 44.

SEARCH AND REPLACE

This is a facility which is provided on most WP programs but is usually somewhat limited and slow. One excellent search and replace program called FINREP is on BOOG volume 57. If you had, say, 27 document files on a disk all containing a wrong phone number — 1234 instead of 1233 — it would be a tedious job to edit them individually. FINREP could handle this all in one fast action. Suppose the files all had the file extension '.DOC', the command syntax would be

FINREP *.DOC // "1234" "1233"

This would find any occurrence of 1234 in any of the document files on the disk and replace it with 1233. Typically this search and replace method is at least ten times faster than handling each file inividually.

The Public Domain programs mentioned can be obtained from **The Public Domain Software Interest Group, 138 Holtye Road, East Grinstead, Sussex RH19 3EA**. It charges £2.00 to copy one volume onto your disk. Send a SAE plus two unaffixed 13p stamps to get a list of some 1400 PD disks. The cheapest (£70.00) source of *Pocket Wordstar* with mailmerge I have seen is **MATMOS Ltd 1 Church Street, Cuckfield, West Sussex RH17 5JZ. Tel 0444 414484**

MEET A SPELLING CHECKER CALLED PROSPELL

WILLIAM JONES takes a searching look at a bolt-on goodie for Arnor's PROTEXT program — a spelling checker called PROSPELL.

One of the reasons for PROTEXT getting such a glowing review in issue 1 of AMTIX!, was that it had been designed with 'expansion' in mind. A spelling checker seemed to be one of the most likely candidates and indeed that's the first in Arnor's range of bolt-on goodies for their word processor.

PROSPELL comes on disk or in a ROM. With the ROM version the software comes on a chip — thus saving memory — and the dictionary arrives on disk. The PROSPELL program takes up about 11,000 characters which might not be much of a problem if you are using a ROM based PROTEXT, but if you have to load the wordprocessor in from disk or tape followed by the spell check software then you might be pushed for space.

I suspect that this space constraint will worry very few potential users — it only becomes a problem if you want to spell check a document while you are in the throes of editing it, under PROTEXT. I found that using the software independently of PROTEXT was by far the most convenient method.

The direct mode can be reached in one of two ways — via the main menu or directly. Loading the program and then issuing the command ISM brings the main menu onto screen. This menu offers seven options, the last five of which allow you to catalogue a disk, erase back up files, turn the printer on or off, change file types or move to the dictionary utilities menu. I will deal with the latter two options in some detail later. The first two options, 'spell check file' and 'two pass check', are the vital ones. Alternatively, the main menu can be circumnavigated with the command ISPELL *filename*, which forces PROSPELL to get straight into the job.

SPELL CHECKING

Spell checking a file is a simple case of selecting either one of the first two options, and supplying the *filename*. With both options the program's first task is to load the text to be examined into memory. If you are using a single drive system the computer prompts a swop between the data disk and dictionary disk at the appropriate time, otherwise the dictionary disk stays in the B: drive with the data disk in the A: drive. Once the data file has been safely tucked away in the computer's innards, the program begins to sort the text into alphabetical order.

After the words have been sorted, each one is presented to the dictionary and a match is sought; if no match is found the word is written to the screen with a question mark and the program waits for you to choose the appropriate course of action. The options open to you are listed at the top of the screen. If the word selected is correct then you can choose to add it to the dictionary or simply ask for it to be ignored. If the word is misspelled, then it can be corrected. If you ignore a word or correct it, then that decision holds true for every occurrence of the same word throughout the text, except where the text file was too large to examine in one block and had to be split in half.

FURTHER OPTIONS

Two more powerful options are available to save users from undue brain strain, the first of which allows a word to be viewed in context, highlighted on screen amidst the text it lives with in the document. The second option provides a lookup system. If you have a word which is very nearly spelled correctly, then by a method known as fuzzy matching, the program searches for any words which vary by virtue of an exchanged character here and there. The chances are, that if your word is only one character out then you'll be presented with a couple of alternatives which more often than not remind you of the correct spelling.

The entire spell checking process happens with great speed but if you don't fancy hanging around while the program wades through the text, you can use the two pass option. This simply means that the program doesn't wait for a response from you as it comes across the mismatched words but writes them to a file and presents them all to you after the spell check has been completed. Despite PROSPELL's great speed, this is a useful option when you are dealing with very large files, or very ignorant authors. The second option also allows you to filter the mismatched words through a series of your own dictionaries.

One option I mentioned earlier was the gateway to the disk utilities menu. From here you can perform all manner of mundane, but essential tasks like editing a dictionary to remove mis-spelled words, listing the contents of a dictionary, counting the words or just changing a dictionary's name. Amongst these options sit two useful routines. The first allows you to find words which fit within a pattern chosen by you. For example, you could ask the program to search for any words which begin with 'th' and end with a 'g' by entering 'th*g'. To limit the search to words which have only 2 letters in the middle then typing in 'th??g' does the trick. A facility such as this is a boon for the crossword cheats. The second option 'anagram', allows a jumbled arrangement of words to be typed in for the software to make some sense of.

Looking at the facilities and the modus operandi of PROSPELL there is more than a hint of similarity between this and THE WORD PLUS, the spell checker bundled with New Star's NEWWORD. Both systems have very large dictionaries: the PROSPELL dictionary contains about 33,000 words while NEWWORD'S has around 45,000. In terms of speed, PROSPELL may just have the edge but the difference just isn't worth getting worked up about. Both spell checkers are able to cope with a variety of different formats generated by the ever growing range of word processors. The only fair and reasonable conclusion is that PROSPELL can sit comfortably alongside THE WORD as a very superior Amstrad spell checker. If you already have PROTEXT then this is a natural choice, but if you have found yourself lumbered with WORD STAR this program could help make your life very much easier.

The other Arnor bolt on is a mail merge program — more details in a future issue.

Prospell by Arnor Ltd: Disk, £24.95; EPROM, £34.95.

GLADIATOR


IT'S NOT MUCH FUN BEING A SLAVE...
...SO I TRAINED LIKE MAD TO BE A GLADIATOR
I WAS SHAKING LIKE A LEAF IN MY FIRST FIGHT...
...BUT I SOON GOT THE KNACK
THE THUMBS UP MEANT I WAS THE EMPEROR'S CHAMPION!
MY FREEDOM AT LAST! BUT CAN YOU BEAT ME?

A LITTLE BACKGROUND READING . . .

Graeme Kidd begins a regular page for Joyce owners with a look at a couple of books that should aid and abet getting to grips with the 8256 and 8512

The launch of a computer is always rapidly followed by the launch of books which are aimed at taking the new user by the hand and leading him or her on a guided tour of the new machine. Publishers fall over one another to be the first to get into print in what they hope will be a lucrative market.

So far as the Joyce is concerned, the race to capture the market represented by the hundreds of thousands of new users has ended in a tie between Collins, who bring yet another book by the prolific computer author, Ian Sinclair into print: *Amstrad Word Processing on the PCW 8256*; while Sigma Press have launched *Mastering the Amstrad PCW 8256/8512* by Dr John Hughes.

Both these tomes retail at £8.95 . Which should you buy? Should you buy both? Not surprisingly, both authors realised the inadequacies of the documentation which accompanies the Joyce computers, but they have each taken a different approach to making their readers familiar with the machine. Ian Sinclair, less ambitiously, sticks with the word processing application and goes no further than *Locoscript*, while Dr Hughes takes a wider view of the machine, offering an introduction to *Locoscript* word processing followed by a whistle stop tour of CPM and selected applications programs.

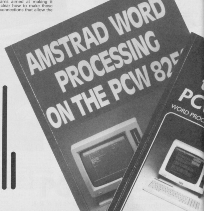
Joyce owners whose sole purpose in life is word processing may find their horizons widened by Dr Hunt's book, as it leads them to the art of mastering their computer, but for people who are thoroughly stuck on *Locoscript*, Ian Sinclair's book provides the more comprehensive treatment of the subject. Taking his reader from the basics of setting the machine up, Ian Sinclair introduces Joyce-style word processing by encouraging the use of the Direct Print mode through which the basic text formatting commands such as centreing, bold, italic and superscript are introduced. In subsequent chapters, layouts for letters, invoices and reports are presented via worked examples; then it's on to templates, file editing and search and replace activities before tips and hints on disk and printer management are given.

The book ends with a comprehensive help section, which takes each *Locoscript* menu in turn and explains what can be done and how to do it. Appendices deal with accents and the alternative character sets available as well as giving a list of useful suppliers of computer requisites. Sound advice all round.

Dr Hughes begins his course of Joyce Mastery with a very basic chapter which includes diagrams aimed at making it very clear how to make those vital connections that allow the new user to get started. A few home truths about the modus operandi of computers in general are thrown in for good measure. Four chapters follow, in which *Locoscript* is introduced and explained using screen dumps of the menus that appear during the activities under discussion, rather than worked examples that include the final printer output.

The second half of Dr Hughes' book takes a look at the operating system that lives within the Joyce — CP/M. Having provided a tutorial on *Locoscript*, Dr Hughes introduces some basic CP/M concepts and takes a look at the rest of the software that comes with the Joyce. Encouraging his readers to experiment with the possibilities offered by the operating system they get with their machine, Dr Hughes explains how to install CP/M software, with and without an INSTALL.COM file, explains PIP (used to move files around) and provides all the information needed to reconfigure the screen and keyboard and set up SUBMIT files to customise CP/M packages for autorun.

The last few chapters introduce the possibilities offered by Applications Programs, beginning with a general overview and continuing with a fairly close look at *Supercalc 2* as an example of a spreadsheet and *Cambase* as an example of database software. The final chapter looks at the way in which the computing power of the Joyce may be harnessed to the benefit of a small business, examining Camsoft's *Payroll* program and Sagesoft's *Popular Accounts*



package, concluding with a peek at NewStar's *NewWord* word processor as one of the more powerful alternatives to *Locoscript*. Finally, there is an appendix, in which a BASIC (in both senses of the word) program is listed which converts *Locoscript* text files to the standard ASCII format. Dr Hughes' book is a useful guide to the full potential of the Joyce as a computer for the serious user.

CONCLUSION

Both these books achieve what they set out to do, but, as their titles suggest, each was written with a different aim in mind. The documentation which accompanies the Joyce is less than wonderfully clear and helpful, and many people struggling with *Locoscript* will find Ian Sinclair's book a godsend. Dr Hunt's chapters on *Locoscript* should also serve to enlighten the confused, but his book reveals much more to the Joyce owner who comes to home or business computing for the first time. On balance, unless you're having insurmountable problems with *Locoscript* and have no intention of doing anything other than process words on your Joyce, Dr Hunt's book is the better buy. The only criticism I have is that he could have mentioned Public Domain CP/M software . . . .

But then, having invested the greater part of £500 on a computer, a further £17 spent on these two books would pay dividends for all but the most computer and CP/M literate Joyce owner.



SOUNDING THE SIREN

ANTHONY CLARKE dissects MASTER DISK, the disk utilities program from Siren Software, and decides it's a very useful tool indeed.

Although the Siren of Greek mythology was to be avoided, the *MASTER DISK* utilities package from **Siren Software** is a definite must for all disk owners.

The package consists of a sector editor a fast formatter, a directory editor, a file transfer program, a sector mapper, a Zip Disk utility, a program deprotector, a header reader for both disk and tape, and a disk copier that copes with special formats. Each utility is accessed from a main menu which then loads the specified program. Most of the utilities return control to the menu after use, with the notable exception of the disk copier which does a hard reset when it has finished. As each program is selected, you are given the option of viewing a help screen which gives a general description of what the program does and an explanation of the controls. The help pages may be dumped to printer to give the user an easy reference sheet or mini manual as an aide memoire, but the screen prompts should prove sufficient for most people

The sector editor follows the standard format of those seen on the RML and IBM machines, and allows specified sectors of the disc to be edited directly. On start up you are asked to specify the track and sector required which is then read into memory for editing. You are then given control of a cursor that can directly put HEX or ASCII codes into the memory block currently highlighted, each sector covering two pages. Pressing f9 at any time writes the sector to disk. You may change tracks or sectors by using CTRL and the cursor keys or go direct to a sector or track by pressing f6 or f5 respectively — f4 returns to the main menu. The sector editor can be used to repair areas of a disk that have been damaged, to change user file numbers or to rename files (with lower case letters) and so on. Using the sector editor calls for a great deal of knowledge about how disks are formatted and more than a little pluck on your part, as a file that was just usable before can become a total write off very easily . . .

SECTOR MAPPER

The sector mapper goes hand in hand with the sector editor and gives you the location on disk of a program or file. The mapper prompts you to insert a formatted disk, although I believe that this should read 'insert a COMPLETELY formatted disk', as when the program happened upon an unformatted track it spent twenty seconds convincing itself that the track was unreadable and worked its way onto the next, taking the same time over that one and so on.

Once the disk reading process has been completed, the program then just issues a prompt for another formatted disk. Fortunately this only happens on unusually formatted disks and should be no problem during normal use.

After a successful disk read you are prompted to press RETURN or P to send the output ▶

to the printer. The printer option is essential, as the output generated by a single program or file could cover several screens. Once the selection between screen and printer output has been made, the numbers of the tracks and sectors occupied by the programs on disk are listed. Pressing a key pauses the listing, but I have yet to find a way of returning to the main menu without switching off the machine. Even when the last program's data is completely shown, the software seems to hang, continuing to show the last three lines of data.

DIRECTORY EDITOR

The directory editor allows direct control over the files on the current disk, with an option to change disks at any stage. Files may be ERASED, UNERASED, HIDDEN from the directory, SHOWN to directory, RENAMED, set to READ WRITE, set to READ ONLY or the USER FILE changed. The most useful of these must be the UNERASE feature — a must for anyone with the bugged version of PIP which insists on wiping the source file every so often. The hide option allows you to set a file to SYSTEM which hides it from the USER directory and places it in the SYSTEM directory. This facility is meant for use in a multi-user system in which each user has personal files with the system files available to all. On a single user system, it is a good way of making a disk look tidy by just having the loader program showing and the rest discretely hidden, as with most commercial disks. The options are selected using single key inputs which are fairly logical, S to set to SYS for example. The file that is to be changed is selected by giving its number in the directory. This program does suffer from a major design flaw in that there are no wildcard facilities, so to change all the files on a disk to read only, for example, could take up to sixty operations. If you want to set a group of files to the same option then it is much easier to use CP/M.

The fast formatter is a welcome relief for those who format a disk using CP/M as it takes less that thirty seconds to format a disk. All the formats are supported including IBM which Amstrad neglected to include on the 6128 DISCKIT2 and DISCKIT3, though why anyone would want a disk capacity of 154k for normal use is beyond me. When formatting is complete, you are given the options of formatting another disk or returning to the main program.

The deprotector remains resident in memory and allows you to load BASIC files that have been saved using the P option. Normally, when a file is loaded the machine checks to see if the program is protected. If it is and the command LOAD or MERGE has been used, the program is deleted. This utility intercepts the deletion routine and places you back in BASIC with the READY prompt.

Unfortunately the option is disabled if the commands TAPE or DISK are used but the utility can easily be restarted by calling &A61B. There is a side effect to this program: if the machine is reset using SHIFT/CTRL/ESC then the computer locks up when you try to load another program. The utility also knows when you are trying to load in the MASTER DISK main program and doesn't intercept to deletion process.

HEADER READERS

The two header readers are selected separately from the main menu, but both have much the same format. The only difference is that the disk header reader asks for the name of the file to be read while the tape header reader just goes ahead and does it. The header readers display the name of the program, the file type (BASIC, Machine Code and so on), the start address and total length, along with the execution address if appropriate, as well as indicating whether the file is protected or not.

The ZIP DISK utility speeds up the disk drive by up to 20% depending on the type of work the drive is doing. Most of the time you would hardly notice the speed increase, but a few loadings timed with a stopwatch show a general improvement. A program that took 11 seconds to load took only 8 after the disk had been ZIPped, although my backup of THE LAST V8 still takes 47 seconds! The utility operates until the machine is switched off, and takes 0 bytes of memory — all it does is change the pause times and stepping times of the disk drive. Such changes can be made under CP/M (with greater eff ect), so it does not interfere with commercial software. The disk drive itself seems none the worse for the speed increase, but sounds just a little more like a rampant insect than it normally does!

TRANS FILE UTILITY

The Trans File utility allows specified files to be copied from disk to disk or disk to tape. Copying files from disk to disk is done in much the same way as with Filecopy, but again there are no wildcard facilities. The disk to tape option is a very strange inclusion but is more useful than you may at first think. Programs that are infrequently used can be transferred to tape by inputting the file name of the program to be copied then inserting a tape, pressing record and play on the recorder followed by a keypress. If a screen picture is to be copied, it has to be loaded into the screen memory first and then saved when a key is pressed — no prompts are given as they would destroy the contents of the screen. This is also true for the disk to disk copier. It would seem that the program tries to store the program to be copied in the same place as it would be stored when executed. This can cause problems with some programs that are placed just above the disk firmware or extended jumpblock, as this is where the copier is located.

The TYPE file is used in the same way as the CP/M version and gives a printout to the screen or printer of a specified ASCII file; pressing any key suspends the printout but the whole file must be shown before you can exit. This utility could prove very useful to people using ED to create programs for COBOL or C who do not wish to go into CP/M to examine their efforts.

The DUMP file is in the same format as *DUMP on the BBC, displaying a list of memory locations on the far left of the screen with HEX code filling the centre portion of the display and ASCII codes on the right. Most machine code programs that you might wish to read through, to change memory locations or text, are stored at 40 hex, and are impossible to list from BASIC. Alternatively, some programs are too long to allow a disassembler to reside in memory at the same time. This utility simply loads in a page of code at a time and displays it. Pressing any key suspends the listing, while pressing ESC twice allows you to load another file or return to the menu.

IMAGE PROGRAM

The IMAGE program is vital for making backups of disk software that uses a strange format or unformatted tracks. The utility loads eight tracks at a time, displaying the track and sector being copied. Some programs, such as THE MUSIC SYSTEM, confuse the program into thinking there are 41 tracks, but if you just ignore the last prompt to insert the destination disk then there should be no problem. So far we have yet to find a disk that it cannot copy — it even copies unformatted disks!

Apart from a few problems, the package seems to work very well on the full range of machines and it offers a comprehensive collection of facilities. Each section is fully documented with clear and precise instructions, and help pages are built into most of the main programs, with strategically placed warning messages about infringing copyright. All the programs support a second disk drive, and the formatter can cope with any of the currently available disk sizes — 5$'', 3£'' and so on.



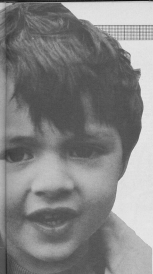
CHIL

Let's talk turtles.

Floor turtles and screen turtles and turning turtles.

And let's talk in the language of turtles — *Logo*. **Because if you're involved with computer education then sooner or later you'll have to learn to speak it.**

Logo is a subject of the computer language *LISP* (LISt Processing) and was developed at the Massachussets Institute of Technology — the famous MIT — over a period of ten years from 1967. The appeal of Logo is in its power, yet relative simplicity, when compared to other computer languages.



D'S PLAY

Introducing Logo — one of the most powerful, yet easy to use, of computer languages.

The language was developed by computer scientists working on the problems of artificial intelligence and whilst being a flexible programming language it was also intended to be easy to learn for adults and children who were not necessarily familiar with computers.

Seymour Papert, the leading pioneer of *Logo*, worked together with the psychologist Piaget and incorporated many of Piaget's thoughts on educational development in his work. They believed that children learned most effectively from models, examples and by problem-solving, and Papert worked to establish a 'microworld' for young children to work in. Many American books on *Logo* are sub-titled 'Exploring Microworlds', 'Adventures in a Microworld' and the like.

By providing children, aged three years and over, with a very powerful tool — the computer — and the means to use it — *Logo* Papert thought that they would be able to explore the two- and three-dimensional aspects of this computer microworld. As they were exploring the microworld children would at the same time be acquiring the habit of structured thinking.

Logo enables children to type a simple-one word command at the computer keyboard, which does not have to be the usual typewriter 'Qwerty' format, to control a turtle floor robot or a turtle sprite on the computer screen. When a floor turtle is connected to the computer the command 'FORWARD 60' at the keyboard causes the floor turtle to move forward 60 units. If a pen is attached to the robot the commands 'PENDOWN, FORWARD 60' will make the robot draw a line as it moves. The screen turtle will also move forward 60 smaller screen units drawing a shape on the computer screen. Thus the three-dimensional world of the floor turtle can be related to the two-dimensional screen.

Turning the turtle can be done by typing the commands 'RIGHT' or 'LEFT' followed by the required number of degrees, and such obvious commands as 'PENUP' and 'PENDOWN' or 'ERASE' (for the screen turtle) enable the child to explore numbers in a two- or three-dimensional context. The number of commands (or primitives in *Logo* language) the turtle knows depends upon the version of *Logo* used.

The language has the ability to memorise the sets of instructions it receives and to store them in its memory as procedures. By using procedures when working with *Logo* children are able to teach the computer and by so teaching develop their own powers of logical thinking.

For example, the child might type in 'TO SQUARE' at the keyboard. *Logo* recognises the 'TO ...' formula at the beginning of a procedure and will accept and list commands but not carry them out until the word 'END' is entered to signal the completion of the teaching procedure. The child now has to discover how to make the floor or screen turtle draw a square. The answer eventually arrived at might be:

```
TO SQUARE
 FORWARD 60 RIGHT 90
 FORWARD 60 RIGHT 90
 FORWARD 60 RIGHT 90
 END
```

If the command 'SQUARE' is now entered both the floor turtle and the screen turtle will draw a 60-unit square in floor units and screen units respectively. The computer will continue to do this every time the command 'SQUARE' is given, for now the computer has been taught how to draw a square each side of which is 60 units long. Most *Logo* commands can be abbreviated and children soon learn that four identical lines can be replaced using 'REPEAT' so that the procedure to draw a 60 unit square becomes:

```
TO SQUARE
 REPEAT 4 (FD 60 RT 90)
 END
```

This is fine as far as it goes, but *Logo* has only been taught to produce a square of side 60 units. Bearing in mind the age and ability of the child the idea of a variable can be introduced. The variable can be given any name other than that already given to a *Logo* primitive and must be preceded by a colon (eg :side), so that the procedure to draw a square of any size would be:

```
TO SQUARE :SIDE
 REPEAT 4 (FD :SIDE RT 90)
 END
```

Now, if the command 'SQUARE' is given followed by a number, the turtle will draw a square of side given by the number which can change each time the command is given.

Procedures can be written to call up other procedures or to call up themselves (recursion) making *Logo* the powerful learning tool it is. Procedures can easily be called from memory for editing. As envisaged by Seymour Papert, the child is thus able to explore the 'turtle geometry microworld'. ▶

The graphic commands can be learned so easily that for many *Logo* means simply the floor or screen turtle, and the list processing and advanced mathematics capabilities of the language are often ignored. Several versions of *Logo* have turtle graphics only and *Logo* turtle graphic simulations written in Basic exist to emphasise the point.

List processing with *Logo* shows its development from *LISP* and is not as straightforward or as easy to learn as turtle graphics — *Logo* list processing has to be learned whereas turtle graphics can be absorbed. A lot of work can be done however using *Logo* procedures and the written word.

Procedures can be written and saved to disk, and on command produce lists of 'Winter Words' or 'Mammals' so that children can use *Logo* for simple data retrieval. Writing procedures to design a 'poetry writer' or automatic postcard writer is usually a popular activity — the computer randomly selecting from lists of nouns, verbs, adjectives and prepositions etc, and putting them together to make grammatically correct and sometimes sensible sentences.

Procedures can be designed to play adventure games and in this way some highly motivational English work can be done.

There is no standard *Logo*, — early versions based on the work done by Papert were simply called *MIT Logo* and later *Apple Logo* as this was then one of the few home computers able to run the program. Logo Computer Systems Incorporated (LCSI) is a company formed to market and research *Logo* and most popular versions are similar to the LCSI implementations for various computers.

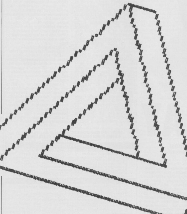
There are two popular versions of *Logo* for Amstrad machines, *Logo 2* which runs with CP/M 2.2 for the CPC464 and CPC664, and *Logo3* which runs with CP/M Plus on the CPC6128 and PCW8256. Both are Digital Research (*Dr Logo*) implementations and are similar in philosophy to most other popular versions (*RML Logo* designed for the RML computer is slightly different). Anyone who has worked with *Logo* should have no difficulty with *Dr Logo*.

Dr Logo 2 has 110 commands for turtle graphics and list processing. Some commands are advanced — like the 'TURTLEFACTS' command which will inform you of the turtle's x and y co-ordinate position, heading, pen position and pen colour and if the turtle is in showturtle mode, yet some of the usual *Logo* commands are missing.

There is no 'HOME' command to return the turtle to centre screen or commands to provide hard copy of procedures. The lack of 'ERALL' (erase all) means that you cannot easily erase all the procedures and variables from the workspace.

Dr Logo 3, running with CP/M Plus, is an enhanced version of *Logo 2* with over 50 extra commands. The 'COPYON' and 'COPYOFF' commands to control a printer are included, as are the commands to print out hard copy of all procedures, named procedures or just the titles of procedures for easy editing. Infuriatingly, there is no equivalent of the usual *Logo* 'Copy screen' command so you cannot easily send turtle graphic pictures to your printer. On request Amsoft wil send you the listing of a screen dump routine for *Logo 3* — but this is a clumsy operation which should not be necessary.

DAVID PAUL



```
?
TO LEG
FD 40 LT 120 FD 60
RT 120 FD 10 RT 60 FD 70
RT 120 FD 60 RT 120 FD 10 RT
60
END


TO SNOOKER
REPEAT 3 (fd 30 lt 120)
REPEAT 3 (leg fd 30 lt 120)
END


TO SNOOKER2
REPEAT 6 (snooker pu bk 20
lt 120 fd 20 rt 60 pd)
```

Building'up a Logo Procedure - Using Logo 2 (With CP/M 2.2)

First a square of variable side is defined:-

```
To Square :side
repeat 4 (fd :side rt 90)
end
```

Then a triangle:-

```
To triangle :side
repeat 3 (fd :side lt 120)
end
```

And a rectangle:-

```
To rectangle :length :width
repeat 2 (fd :length lt 90 fd
:width lt 90)
end
```

Then panes for the windows using the square procedure already defined:-

```
To panes :side
square :side / 4
square :side / 8
fd :side / 8 rt 90
fd :side / 8 lt 90
square :side / 8
lt 90 fd :side / 8
rt 90 fd :side / 8
end
```

Putting all the procedures together in one procedure, House:-

```
To house :side
st
square :side
fd :side rt 90
triangle :side
fd :side / pu rt 90 fd :side / 2
pd
rectangle :side / 2 :side / 3
pu rt 90 fd :side / 10 lt 90 pd
panes :side
pu bk :side / 3 pd
panes :side
pu fd :side / 3 + :side / 2 rt 90
fd :side / 10 + :side / 3 +
:side / 2 rt 90
pd
ht
end
```



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LETTERTECH

This month Gary Liddon once again casts an eye over some of the technical letters received during the month, and answers the various queries. If you would like to contribute thoughts relating to the AMTECH section of AMTIX!, whether it be comments on articles already published or thoughts on products available, or if you have any problems using any hardware or software, write now to AMTECH, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB.

SAVING PARTLY COMPLETED GAMES TO DISK

Dear Amtech,
I am a very new 6128 owner and so still very ignorant. Please help me! I quickly realized that most games are only on tape, but with *Discovery* I have managed to transfer them to disk. Is there any way I can save partly completed games to disk, I am thinking particularly of *Classic Adventure*, *Castle Blackstar* and the superb *Covenant* by PSS. Please help me.
Lynne Ludlece, The Heath, Leighton Buzzard

Without quite a bit technical knowledge, coupled with hours of gawping at someone else's code, it seems unlikely that saving out data files to disk from the games you mention is an easy task to achieve. Still if a SPEED WRITE 1 is executed before the prog is loaded then the data will probably save out quicker to tape.

HINTS FOR LOADING

Dear Amtech,
In response to your article on the problems of loading I give you my solution. Whenever the word 'Read error' appears I rewind the tape to the beginning of the block (about 10 revs) and press play as if nothing had happened. There are no prompts telling you that everything is going okay apart from the usual 'Loading . . . block! I find this unworded in the 64 manual and feel that it helps loading no end. There is only one catch that it does not work or program using loaders (which do not print up Read errors) this bracket of programs unfortunately is a very big one.
Nathon Jones, York Road, Weybridge

It's always a bit of a bind having to load progs that load with the normal Amstrad loading system yet cut out all the helpful LOADING BLOCK xx messages. If you can get into the loader, replace any exclamation marks that you may find in the filenames and the helpful messages will return.

MODULATOR PROBLEMS

Dear Amtix!
I own an Amstrad CPC 464 with green monitor and I recently purchased a power supply modulator for my Amstrad. However, I am experiencing a small problem with the modulator. When I had connected all the leads (power supply, monitor, etc) and tried to load *The Way of the Exploding Fist* the computer either simply reset itself or showed a blank screen after reading the first block.

A similar problem with *Everyone's a Wally* also occurred but this time the game would not run after it had finished loading. I have had no problems with other games such as *Yie Ar Kung Fu*, *Hypersports*, *Sorcery*, and *Boulderdash* for example. Could you please tell me what is wrong?

Also, is it possible to improve the picture quality sent out by the modulator. The picture on my portable TV set was blurring.
Kenny Shek, Ibrox, Glasgow

A quick phone call to the hallowed halls of Amstrad down at sunny Brentwood elicited the response that you must be in possession of a faulty modulator and that is probably causing glitches on the DC in-line to your Straddles. It's also likely to be linked to the cause of your muddy picture problem as well. The best advice I can offer is for you to return the article to the place of purchase and explain your problem.

PROBLEMS TO BE ANSWERED

Dear Amtech,
I am writing a character design/artist program that lets the user reproduce pictures drawn, at a later stage, using RSX commands. I have nearly finished it, but I am stuck on a couple of parts:—
1. How do you save the character?
2. How is screen memory set out? I cannot figure it out at all. All I know is that it starts at &C000 and ends at &FFFF, (16K in all)
J Townsend, Bognor Regis.

For some totally unkown reason the Amstrad screen map is laid out in a rather strange manner. Starting at &C000 a line of eighty bytes runs from one side of the screen to the other. Though you would expect the next line to start at &C000+80 (&C050) it doesn't, &C080 to &C080$80 (&C0A8) are displayed 8 lines below. The following listing should demonstrate quite well how things are displayed:

```
10 MODE 1
20 FOR F=&C000 TO &FFFF
30 POKE F,255
40 NEXT F
```

As for the character saving, we're not exactly sure what you mean. Save to tape? Save to disk? Save to memory? From what you say it sounds as if you'd greatly benefit from the ownership of a complete firmware specification. Available from Amstrad this handy bit of literature will detail fully how screen memory is stored and also the layout of the character set.

ONE LETTER Z TOO MANY

Dear Amtech,
When Mr Stephen Barber wrote to you about saving games from tape to disk you gave him a bit of information in issue 5 on how to do this. When I read it, I thought 'GREAT!!' I hopped over to my Straddles 6128 and tried it out. When I typed in the second line, which you might remember as being **Memory & ZFFF**, and the micro's answer was 'syntax error'. What did I do wrong?
Matthew Huntington, Annisgarth, Windermere

Oh dear, we do apologise but the problem is caused by the erroneous Z, probably slipped in by those obnoxiously raucous ZZAP! lads. What you should have typed is MEMORY &2FFF, with this ever so slight alteration you should now be able to get all of Level 9's product working on your 6128.

IS MY 6128 ILL?

Dear Amtech
Help! I think my 6128 is ill. When I press the keys Q, W and E at the same time the Computer takes this as an Escape and puts up * Break, should this happen?
Kevin Hall, Norwich, Norfolk

You nasty sadistic person, pressing all those keys on your poor little computer. No Kevin, it's perfectly normal for a 6128 to go 'qew*Break*' if you prod it in such a fashion. Because of the keyboard construction you'll find that the computer will get quite confused if you hold down three or more keys at any given time. It really isn't much of a disadvantage.

WRITING A FAMILY TREE

Dear Lettertech,
I own a 6128 and I'm writing a family tree program, which uses the second 64K bank as a Ramdisk for the data of every person. What I would like to know is how can I save the second 64K bank to disk?

Secondly, is there any way of erasing a file from disk from a BASIC program?

Also can you suggest a book like Amstrad's specification manual for the 6128? And on the same subject is there an Assembler/Disassembler that sits in bank 2, but Disassembles and Assembles to bank 1?

Lastly, will I 'burn out' the PSU if I add a DMP 2000 printer and a second disk drive? (I'm querying after fatal results with a Spectrum!)
G Ross, Benson, Oxford

Saving out the second bank is a bit tricky but can be accomplished by paging in each bank to the &4000 to &8000 slot and then saving it out as a binary file. The following listing should do that:

```
10 CALL &BD5B,1,2,3,4: REM page in first 16K block of second 64K
20 SAVE "PART1",B,&4000,&4000: REM and save it.
30 CALL &BD5B,1,2,3,4,5
40 SAVE "PART2",B,&4000,&4000
50 CALL &BD5B,1,2,3,4,5,6
60 SAVE "PART3",B,&4000,&4000
70 CALL &BD5B,1,2,3,4,5,6,7
80 SAVE "PART4",B,&4000,&4000
```

In machine code load the accumulator before calling &BD5B with the bank needed to be switched in. A full description of this sort of thing will be contained in the new Amstrad firmware guide that should be available from the middle of May. In it will be full details of the whole range of Amstrad machines and their firmware. Erasing a file from BASIC is rather simple as you can put the file name specifier in a string then use IERA,@A$ to perform the task.

***Pyradev* sounds like the sort of assembler you need even though it does sit in the first bank. It assembles from disk and reads the text file into the second bank.**

As a result assembly is extremely whizzy indeed. Also because assembly is disk based you can produce really large object files from very very large source files quite easily. The addition of a DMP 2000 with a second disk drive should cause no trouble as both devices have their own power supplies while the Spectrum's microdrive and printer both drew power from the actual computer

THROUGH A STAR DARKLY

Dear Amtech,
Recently I wrote to you complaining that I was unable to load the game *Dark Star* on the 6128. Well please ignore that letter now. I had been trying to

do so using a Benkson Cassette Recorder which I bought from Dixons. I broke this on the Sunday evening when the RECORD button went solid and I tried to force it.

My wife took it back to our local Dixon's in the Rye Market at Stourbridge and they very kindly replaced it with one of their DIXONS DATACORDER SR7s. While trying it out on Monday evening, testing it with *Splat!* and *Warlord* I decided to try *Darkstar* as well out of curiosity. You could have knocked me down with a feather when the loading screen gave way to the Main Menu and I was actually able to sample the game! This was no fluke as I have since loaded it successfully and run it twice this evening.

As you say on page 12 of Issue 5 for March (which I only got on Monday after posting my previous letter) it does lock up at the end of each game and have to be re-loaded, but at least I can now play the darned thing.

I would recommend to B Bruce and Ben Taylor and anyone else experiencing tape loading difficulties with the 6128 to try the combination of AMSOFT CL1 lead and DIXONS SR7 DATACORDER. What has worked for me may well work for them too.

SJ Pee, Brierley Hill, W Midlands

PS Many thanks for such an interesting and informative magazine — might you consider at sometime taking a look at LOGO? Perhaps as a follow up to the articles on CP/M?

Thank you a lot for your useful tape hints adding to large volume that Amtix seems to be building up. Maybe we should write a book. As for a LOGO piece, well that would nice but no—one at AMTIX! Towers is terribly au fait with Mr Papert's esoteric language. However if any kind soul with a modicum of writing plus extensive knowledge of LOGO were to send in such an article we would be more than happy to look at it with a view to publication.

CRACKING THE SYSTEM

The Radio Hacker's Code Book by George Sassoon, £6.95, Duckworth

The title of this book scarcely does it justice. It is destined to become a bible for radio hackers, and it also serves as an excellent introduction and reference book for anybody interested in cryptography (code-breaking) and data protection.

The book is in two main parts, getting radio waves into your computer, and turning them into useful data. While the first of these is comprehensive and concise, it assumes you have some previous knowledge of electronics. Sassoon at one point refers to dipole aerials but fails to explain what they are. Similarly, he provides sample machine code routines for getting your computer to recognise incoming data-streams which presupposes a general grasp of the nature of assembler.

If you happen to know a tame wirehead who can explain the odd buzzword then you should be able to get the drift of what is going on. This quite complex technical approach is the book's only fault, and Sassoon does point out that this section is only for those who do not wish to buy a standard RS232 interface. If you're the type of person who is willing to make a terminal unit you're likely to have the necessary knowledge to get the most out of this section.

The real meat of the book deals with what to do with the data once it is inside the computer. This includes a definitive analysis of the Baudot code (a type of ASCII used for RTTY transmissions), covering not only the US and UK versions but also the two methods used in the Soviet Union. The book is worth buying for this alone.

CODES THROUGH THE AGES

There are two types of code: one resembles Morse (or ASCII) which is simply a method of sending letters as dots and dashes or zeroes and ones. The other is a cipher, used to hide the meaning of a message from those unauthorised to receive it. Most people know that ciphers have been in use since Julius Caesar, if not before, and Sassoon provides a readable history of the types of cipher used since then, including Hellschreiber and Vigenere and continuing right up to Enigma, the code used by the Germans in the last world war.

There is BASIC listing provided which allows you to create your own Enigma messages. Indeed, the book is dotted with listings, either in machine code or BASIC, which supplement the text, and should provide food for thought for most amateur programmers. The machine code is not based on one particular computer, but on the Z80 chip, and similarly the BASIC is of the universal variety. This is simply a cut-down version of normal BASIC and will run quite happily on most machines.

A large proportion of the book is about the two major ciphers used by business and government, DES (the Data Encryption Standard) and its possible replacement RSA (the public-key cryptosystem). These two codes are very much in the news at the moment, and Sassoon explains both clearly, showing you how to break or solve them and read otherwise secret messages.

Most methods of breaking RSA require the factorisation of large numbers (100 digits long) and the book contains a examples of fast-factoring algorithms.

BREAKING THE LAW

Sassoon does not specifically say that some activities, even simply receiving radio waves, may be illegal, but this is probably clear from the general tone of his remarks. Sassoon is rightly critical of DES but overlooks one feature which vastly improves its security: you can take the coded output of a message put through DES, and then put it through again. As most methods of breaking ciphers centre around trying to get a readable text, that makes DES much harder to break.

Sassoon suggests that the secrecy surrounding DES is impossible with such a simple concept as RSA (named after its inventors Rivest, Shamir and Adleman) and this is the only reason I can find for the somewhat misleading title of the book. He can scarcely be afraid of the powers that be, because he has appeared on the *Horizon* programme on BBC.

Even so, it's interesting to read that after they had published their initial ideas, while at an American university, Shamir and his colleagues suddenly had their government funds cut, in a feeble attempt to silence them.

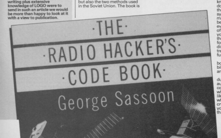
KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

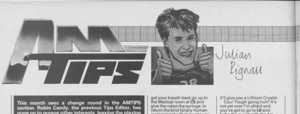
This book provides you with the ideal weapon to ensure your privacy in a cashless society where everything is recorded on computers: and that weapon is knowledge. Furthermore, it does not just provide a guide to the concepts behind public-key systems, but goes into the mathematics in a way which will be accessible to anyone with even the most basic knowledge of maths. At the same time, if you already know about number theory (the theoretical foundation of RSA) you won't be disappointed with Sassoon's treatment of the Phi (M) function.

If all this weren't enough, the book has an index and a bibliography which would grace any academic work.

This is not a book to scan during *Crossroads* and the author does require a small commitment of mental effort, which is well rewarded. It is likely to become the standard by which other books on RTTY and cryptography are judged, and if you are interested in either, buy this book.

Michael Jampel





This month sees a change round in the AMTIPS section. Robin Candy, the previous Tips Editor, has gone on to pursue other interests, leaving the playing tips in the capable hands of JULIAN RIGNALL, a young man whose biggest (and perhaps most dubious) claim to fame in the arcade stakes is having been a past *Computer & Video Games* arcade games champion. Take it away Julian . . .

After being dumped at the helm of the good ship AMTIPS at rather short notice I'm desperately trying to get everything ship-shape and Bristol fashion. Still, from the ashes a Phoenix rises so it's said, and there are two very useful maps — the whole of *Shadowfire* and the first two levels of the torturous *Bounder* to help you along. The are also a few POKEs, mini tips and other bits and pieces which should be useful to Amster gaming people.

Right, straight onto the *Oi matey section*, the bit written *with* the help of readers *for* the help of readers. There must be lots of you out there with the ability to play well, solve games and perhaps even map out games? If you can then why not earn yourself the gratitude of thousands of people by sending in your favourite tips or perhaps a map which has been lovingly compiled — all it costs is the price of a stamp and perhaps an hour of your time! So next Saturday don't watch *The Price is Right* — knock up some tips. You never know, you *might* even earn yourself a free piece of software or a fabbo AMTIX! T-shirt . . .

STRANGELOOP (Virgin)

Well blow me down, Richard J Evans, **who comes from Borth, a stone's throw away from my home town of Aberystwyth, Dyfed, has just completed Virgin's ace space arcade adventure,** *Strangeloop*. **Being a kind soul (but then everyone from Aberystwyth is) he's sent in the complete solution. Read on . . .**

GENERAL TIPS

The game is very easy to map, being made up of 25 rows of ten. If you make a grid and number the top row 1 to 10 and the side A to Y you'll know exactly where the locations you are.

To get a high score you must collect most of the supplies and destroy a lot of Swarf. It's a good idea to occasionally leave the bike to conserve fuel — needless whizzing about soon depletes your energy. The Jetman is immune to Megaswarf when he is on foot. However you need the bike to get into the control room at the end.

NOW THE BIG BIT

Right, when you start go straight to room **N2** and collect the jetbike by using the angled panel to shoot the flying robot. Got it? Good, now climb get into it and trundle your way along to **N9** and get the magnet. It looks impossible to get into but is in fact easily entered by using the secret passage on the right of the upper level in section **N8**. Once you've gone there go forth to the General Store in **R7** and get the extra life, just nip in and out when the robot is at the furthest right of its travels.

The next task is to beetle over to **S4** and get the Shogun tape and as soon as you've done that whizz off to room **U6**. Get the pleasure circuit and take it to the depressed, run-down robot in **V8**. The demented fellow will now be very happy indeed, bounce about the place with ecstasy and give you a syringe. Once you've got over the excitement go up to room **J8** and get the bouncing bomb. Continue your kleptomania by jetbiking your way to **H5** and swipe the soldering iron. Now, this isn't easy to get but if you position your jetbike above and between the 'cage' and the attached panel and then descend slowly you should be able to slip into and out of the cage with the soldering iron. Next get the welding equipment from **E9** and the ultra-violence device from **A3**.

All OK so far? When you've got your breath back go up to the Medical room at **C5** and give the robot the syringe. In return the kind binary human replacement will give unto you a silicon chip. Leave that room and sport down to **D3**, acquire the goggles and put them on. Now enter room **E3** and use your welder to remove the metal door.

After that strenuous bit of exercise chunter along to the computer room (found in row **J1**) and place the UV device there to prevent yourself being electrocuted in **G6**. Next onto it'll give you a Lithium Crystal.

Coo! Tough going huh? It's not yet over I'm afraid and you've got to go to **L6** and bribe the guard with the 1cr coin. Doing so allows you access to the next room along, **L7**, and there you can use your magnet to keep the key still and thus enable you to pick it up. When the key is safely in your pocket go to 'Bubbles TV' at **J5** and give him the TV. He'll be ever so grateful and give you a lovely present — some handcuffs. Whizz along to **J2** and open the door with the



room **B3**, up the rightmost shaft to **A3** ('We Shall Salute You All . . .') and pick up the TV. Go down to **P1** and get the 5cr coin by ramming your bike about half way between the floor and the upper level on the right hand side of the room. Exit the jetbike and go straight through the wall to get the coin. You might have to sacrifice a life because it's difficult to get back up to the jetbike. Remount the bike and go to the vendromat machine at **Y4** and use the coin while standing in front of it. This gives you a fuse and 1cr change!

Take yourself to **T4** and fix the teleporter by first using the fuse and then the soldering iron. Use the teleporter to get to **A2**, grab the oil can and return. 'Many Fish in the Cosmos' at **O8** is the next stop and while you're there get the silicon chip. You can then get into **O9** and grab 'a nice plaice'. Onto room **Q5** via the now defunct electrocution room and get the acid, then down a level to **R4** and give the oilcan to the robot there. In exchange



key. Next, go to room **L1**, fly over sign No 2, press fire and pick up the ID card.

The next port of call is the Robot Tape Store at **A6**. Use the ID to disable the guard then go to the main panel and use the Shogun tape (this replaces any ammo packs you've picked up) and then the

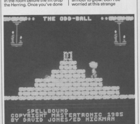
magnet (to disable the guard outside the main control room). Go into the Control Room (**F2** and put on the goggles to see something nasty! Use the handcuffs and set off the bomb. Whizz outside and let the bomb explode and go back in and place the fish over the control panel. Put the goggles back on (for reassurance) and go to the upper level to place the Lithium Crystal over the small diamond shape . . . Dah Daaahhhh — finito!

SPELLBOUND (MAD)

Stuck on *Spellbound*? Never fear, Laurence Edwards **of Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire has got some highly useful tips.**

First go and get the glowing bottle and drop the advert (read it before you do, just for a laugh). Now pick up the Herring and the Teleport key and bounce your way left towards the lift. Mind out for Mr Bouncing Ball, 'cos he's nasty and swipes your energy. In the room before the lift drop the Herring. Once you've done and command him to be happy and to eat and drink. Examine the hapless fellow and if his stamina is a bit on the low side then put him to sleep with a jolly wave of your Wand of Command. Head back to the lift and on your way command Florin to be happy, eat and drink. At the lift drop the teleport key and go to the second floor. On this level you should find Elrand the Halfelven and Samsun the Strong. From Samsun take the Elf Horn and from Elrand the Miolnir. Blow the Elf Horn and summon Florin and restore your energy using the same 'give the bottle' process as before.

Go back to Thor on the Third floor and give him the Miolnir, and if his stamina is high enough waken him. Go to the lift and summon Thor with the Elf Horn and ask him to help you. You'll now be able to to get down to the ground floor and basement. Drop the glowing bottle, enter lift, whizz down to the ground floor and walk along to the end. Stroll over the strange liquid and cast the Armoarium Photonius spell which should cause your armour to glow. Don't be worried at this strange



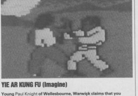
that enter the lift and whizz up to the roof and pick up the bottle of liquid. Walk right all the way along the top of the roof until you get to the wand, which you should pick up. Now teleport.

Bound left and find your good old mate Florin and awaken him with your Wand of Command. Once the sleepy devil is up and about give him the bottle of liquid and immediately take it back from him — this restores your energy to its maximum. Now you'll be full of energy and be able to bound right, find Thor phenomenon, just walk past the room called 'The Little Bottle'.

Summon Rosmar, give her the pocket laser and ask her to help you. She'll happily oblige and burn the wall down. If you go down to the basement level and grab the Power Pong Plant, then back to level three and retrieve the Herring and go with them to the Mush Room on the first floor, you'll be able to cast Fumaticus Protecticum which makes you immune to Nightshade gas.

That's it so far, next month there'll be some more tips . . .

THE LITTLE, BUT JOLLY USEFUL, TIPS



YIE AR KUNG FU (Imagine)

Young Paul Knight **of Wellesbourne, Warwick claims that you can get 'amazing scores' on Imagine's** *Yie Ar Kung Fu* **by following this simple move:—**
At the start of each fight move back about a centimetre and wait for your opponent to attack. When he or she does, jump straight up into the air, making your opponent go underneath you to the far left of the screen. As soon as you land turn around and kick them in the stomach as fast as you can. They won't be able to move or defend themselves. HA!

ONE MAN AND HIS DROID (Mastertronic)

Aaron Cook **from Glenrothes, Fife has found all the passwords to the twenty levels of Mastertronic's** *One Man and his Droid*

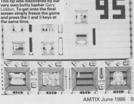
1. NONE	11. BLIZZARD
2. EMPIRE	12. CLOCHE
3. PREDATORY	13. COLANDER
4. RUMINATE	14. ECTOPLASM
5. RYEGRASS	15. ECOLOGY
6. VACUUM	16. FEROCIOUS
7. VAMPIRE	17. FETLOCK
8. RAGOUT	18. GOOSEBERRY
9. GRAIN	19. GRAVITATE
10. AASVOGEL	20. UPANDAWAY

ZORRO (US Gold)

To go through an impassable barrier or door go right up to it, press jump and walk at the same time. Eventually you'll go right through.

COMET (Firebird)

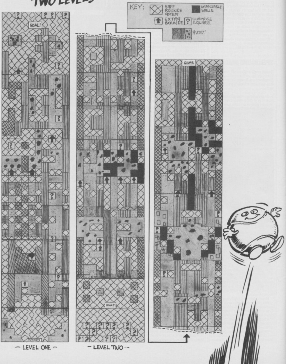
This tip was discovered by our very own butty basher Gary Liddon. **To get onto the final screen simply freeze the game and press the 0 and 9 keys at the same time.**



AM-TIPS

BOUNDER

THE FIRST TWO LEVELS




SHADOWFIRE
THE MAP
KEY
DOORS
OPEN
LOCKED
HIDDEN
THREE STARTPOINTS
KEYCARD
MASTER KEYCARD
SELF-DESTRUCT CARD
SELF DESTRUCT UNIT
TIME DELAY UNIT
BOMB
GRENADE
KNIFE
CHAIN
LAZERRIFLE
LAZERS
ROCKET LAUNCHER (LOADED)
EMPTY
BEWARE THE ENEMY!
TROOPERS
HUMANOID SQUAD LEADERS
ROBOT SQUAD LEADERS
MARSHALLS
FIGHTER PERSONNEL QUARTERS
ENGINEERING WORKSHOP
EXHAUST PORT ONE
ENGINEERING CONTROL
EXHAUST PORT TWO
SHUTTLE BAY SUITING ROOM
SHUTTLE BAY
SHUTTLE CONTROL
STERN CONTROL
ASSEMBLY AREA
MILITARY ARMOURY
FIGHTER LAUNCH BAY
ROBOT REPAIRS AND WORKSHOP
GUNDECK
SECURITY CONTROL
BARRACKS



SECURITY CONTROL
MARSHALL VATOR'S COMMAND POST
ZOFF ARMOURY
ROBOT SECURITY
FIGHTER CONTROL
ROBOT CONTROL COMPUTER
OFF DUTY LOGGING
BARRACKS BRIEFING ROOM
LT.'S QUARTERS
FLIGHT CONTROL SECURITY CUT OFF
COMPUTERS REPAIR ROOM
SIGNALLING COMPUTER
TRANS-LATION COMPUTER
PROVISIONS AND STORES
NAVIGATORS QUARTERS
CAPTAINS CABIN
CANTEEN AND BAR
COMPUTER SECURITY
MILITARY SECTION RECEPTION
MILITARY SECTION CHECK
ROBOT TO HUMAN LIAISON
FLIGHT CONTROL SECURITY CUT OFF
FLIGHT PERSONNEL QUARTERS
SKY FORTRESS BRIDGE
ESCAPE SHUTTLE COMPUTER
ESCAPE SHUTTLE AIRLOCK
PILOT AREA SECURITY
ESCAPE SHUTTLE SUIT LOCKER
ESCAPE SHUTTLE NAVI COMPUTER
SCIENCE AND INFORMATION ACCESS
INFORMATION CENTRE
SCIENCE CENTRE
SUIT LOCKER
SHUTTLE BAY
MAP DRAWN BY OLIVER FREY BASED ON DAVID ROBINSONS

● POKES ● POKES ● POKES ● POKES ●

Justin Garvanovic of Hillingdon, London has got the right idea when it comes to giving the Amstrad a darn good POKEing. The following POKEs are all from him:

To put ANY of these listings into action just load the game normally, when the green LOADing message appears, turn the computer off and back on again. Type in the alternate header listing (save it for future use if you like), RUN it and press play on tape to LOAD the rest of the game in the normal way.



FINDERS KEEPERS (Mastertronic)

This gives you infinite lives

```
10 OPENOUT "D
20 MEMORY &7FF
30 LOAD "",&800
40 POKE &20CE,0
50 CALL &800
```

BOUNTY BOB (US Gold)

And here's some more infinite lives

```
10 MODE 1
20 FOR N = &A400 TO &A44C
30 READ A$: POKE N,VAL("&"
+ A$)
40 NEXT N
50 MEMORY 82000
60 LOAD "!": LOAD "!", 82040
70 CALL &A400
80 DATA F3, 3E, 4E, 32, 74, 22,
3E, 9F
90 DATA 32, 75, 22, 3E, C9, 32,
69, 22
100 DATA 3E, 3E, 32, 6A, 22,
3E, C0, 32
110 DATA 6B, 22, 21, 40, 20, 11,
40, 00
120 DATA 01, 37, 02, ED, B0,
21, 40, 00
130 DATA E5, 21, 00, BB, E5,
21, 37, 02
140 DATA E5, 21, 07, B8, E5, 21,
BB, 02
150 DATA E5, F1, 21, EA, B1,
11, D9, B1
160 DATA C9, 21, 00, 00, 22, 71,
06, 22
170 DATA 73, 06, C3, 40, 00
```

TAU CETI (CRL)

Guess what — more infinite lives BUT also: ammo, flares and fuel!

```
10 OPENOUT "D
20 MEMORY 1529
30 LOAD "!"
40 CALL 2000
50 LOAD "!"
60 LOAD "!"
70 POKE &4FC0,0
80 POKE &5025,0
90 POKE &4FF2,0
100 POKE &3B49,0
110 POKE &3B4A,0
120 POKE &324F,255
130 CALL &88BB
```

A MASSIVE £100 WORTH OF SOFTWARE TO BE WON IN THE GOLDEN AMTIPS MEGA POKES COMPETITION.

Calling all ye hackers. Have you the ability to break into games and POKE unlimited lives or energy? Perhaps you've got a set of POKES which do something special to a game, change the colours of the screen or access all the screens maybe? If you have then send them in to the usual AMTIPS address. The sender of the best set of POKES will win themselves £100 worth of Amstrad software — not bad huh? What more need I say apart from GET HACKING. I'll be giving a run down on the best ones sent in within a few issues.

CONTRAPTION (Audiogenic)

And even more infinite lives

```
10 OPENOUT "D"
20 MEMORY 1999
30 LOAD "", 15000
40 CALL 28650
50 LOAD "", 15700
60 POKE &5EC9,0
70 POKE &5ECA,0
80 POKE &5ECB,0
90 POKE &5ECC,0
100 CALL 23700
```

That's it for this month. Now, don't forget what I said at the beginning of this bijou AMTIPS columnette — the survival of this section of the magazine depends on you, dear reader, so send in your tips and maps to AMTIPS, AMTIX! MAGAZINE, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB. By the way, don't forget to write AMTIX! on the envelope otherwise Pat 'n' Doreen the mail sorting ladies will stomp downstairs and beat me about the head and shoulders with a large, blunt instrument, just like they did with my previous colleague.



GETTING A C

Last month we interviewed Coventry-based PSS and spoke to two of the faces behind the company, GARY MAYS and programmer-in-chief MIKE SIMPSON. In the interview Mike spoke of an artificial intelligence program which he had developed and used in his *Swords and Sorcery* program. Interested, JULIAN RIGNALL speaks to him again and asks him to explain what he means by 'artificial intelligence' and how he approaches the concept on a home micro.



'If you approach it from a games point of view, using LISP and PROLOG type languages and database structures, it can't be done, not on a micro,' explains Mike. 'What has to be done is a kind of simulation, a sort of *artificial* artificial intelligence.

'Say the player has to choose a certain attack and defence and the computer has to do the same. You have a points rating for the different combinations so the computer can look at what type of attack and defence the player is taking, add up the points for it and come out with the perfect defence and the perfect attack. If it does that all the time then it's a bit boring — you could never win. That's intelligence in a way — well, the games theory side of it.

'What you have to do, though, is put in random factors to get it to fail once in a while, and not let it look at the player's tactics but to look at what it did last time. The problem with that is it's generally not good enough and you have to cheat a little bit and let it look at what you're going to do, but once you start doing that it starts getting too clever again.

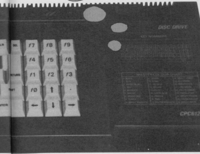
'The other side of it is natural languages parsing. If you try to do that properly you'll need a fairly large mini computer system, a lot of time and a LISP or PROLOG compiler! For a small system you have to restrict the vocabulary and get a system which checks for certain sequences of words. You then get a set of key words, usually verbs which are applicable to certain objects, then actions which are applicable to the objects. Even then most of the time it'll say 'I don't understand' because there are so many other options that it won't be able to

COMPUTER TO THINK

r-

L

s



cope with.'

What about the type of AI programs which you could just chat to?

'You could produce something that would converse in a relatively sensible way, though the computer would eventually run out of things to say on a particular subject and if you don't let it change the subject it'll get stuck. The easiest thing to do is get it to turn round things that you say — "I am good at games" and the computer says "So, you are good at games". There are always exceptions where it'll get something wrong, and you'll always get people trying to find out those things and make it look silly. It's impossible to make it truly intelligent, not on a home micro anyway.'

How far is it possible to take an Amstrad and teach it about itself?

'You mean "You are a computer program" and it says "Am I? What's that?" "Well a computer program is . . . " and go on from there? You could go though the motions of teaching it but in the end you can only ask it things it knows about.'

And the future of AI?

'Well, it's not going to be used for anything frivolous but in the beginning more for things like Expert Systems and machine translations. They're more practical applications. You'll most probably get a sort of home butler which will sell a few — mostly to Americans (laughs). There's a fun aspect of AI, but these are mostly games things.'

Was the development of the language for *Swords and Sorcery* a complicated process?

'No, not really. The whole point of the language was to save memory. So I produced a language which was very quick at sifting through the database and checking the various flags and also allows you to change the records in the database very quickly.

'You see, you develop a list of commands and then you decide how the language is going to work — interpreted or compiled. It's easier if you do it interpreted. The program then looks through the list of bytes which represent the codes for your commands, interprets them so it'll take the first byte, which is effectively an IF command, go to the routine that evaluates the IF command and that will determine the length of the expression. Then it will call up the expression evaluator which will work out whether it's true or false. If it's true then it'll execute the block of code.

'There are also 'fuzzy switches' where you have a list of options and you want to randomly select, to a certain extent, different probabilities, such as printing a certain sentence out. It's boring if you say something the same way all the time so you randomly slot together the bits of the sentence or whatever. I have a 'fuzzy print' command which selects from a list of phrases and prints one off that list.

'It's not that hard to come up with a little language as long as you keep it structured. It's what you might call a 'No' based language. A lot of languages under test conditions say 'if this is true — then do this' and then check to see if it is true. Ninety per cent of the time the answer's going to be no so you construct a language that runs faster if the answer's no.'

How will AI develop in games, then?

'I've started it in *Swords and Sorcery*, but basically it's more of a universe simulation where you simulate an environment which has realistic effects. In that way it's AI in a much wider sense — you must have an intelligent environment with creatures that react in a sensible way. The conversations which you can have with them are very limited but within the limits they react in a very normal way. I mean, if you're negotiating a contract then you wouldn't really be talking about the weather anyway!

'Simulating a universe doesn't take up as much memory as you'd think. You have models of everything — a record of what can be done to an object, its size, weight, hardness, what it does under various conditions. Writing in the language I developed for *SAS* you can describe what happens when you pick it up, drop it, wear it, take it off, hold it in your hand and try to use it. So once you've got the objects and where they are in the universe all you need are the monsters.

Are they also 'intelligent'?

'When you meet a monster in *SAS* the computer first reacts to your current state, reads the monster's record and there are a lot of flags in that record to say how the monster reacts, how hostile, brave, sceptical, greedy it is. Then there's a status check on you — whether you've killed something, is there blood on your sword, are you carrying a staff, and so on, and each of those has a points value. It adds these all up and modifies these along with its courage, hostility etc and comes up with a basic reaction — it might insult you, run off, throw magic or whatever. That's simulated intelligence, it doesn't understand what's going on, but just checks what it sees, adds up a whole lot of points and makes a decision.'

But isn't that life anyway?

'Yes, and it just depends how you define intelligence. It's what it appears to be. If it looks intelligent, it is.'

SKETCH A STRATOCRUISER

AND WIN EVERYTHING THAT MIKRO-GEN HAS EVER DONE ON THE AMSTRAD PLUS COPIES OF ITS LATEST SMASHEROO,

EQUINOX

AMTIX! COMPETITION

In the frozen wastes of space the ancient asteroid of Sury-Ani 7 revolves slowly, lit by the unfriendly beams of a decaying sun.

This gargantuan lump of cosmic debris once served as a mining complex, and is now littered with cannisters of radioactive waste guarded by belligerant robots.

This is the setting of *Equinox*, the latest release from Mikro-Gen, and into this lethal world travels a lowly mining droid, whose task it is to dump the cannisters before they explode, all the while battling against the legions of robotic security guards . . .

Well, it's a darn sight better than being a lowly competition minion whose inspiring task is to hump bags of explosive comp mail, all the while avoiding the baleful eye of an aged editor. Just about the only break I get is thinking up these competitions, and sometimes I can't even do that without ol' crumbly interfering.

'Hey, minion,' he grunts, 'Those guys at Mikro-Gen are giving away copies of some space game or other for a competition, so get the kids to paint a spacecraft. Yeah, and throw in an alien or two for good measure. You've got ten minutes.'

I ask you, is that any way to run a magazine? Spacecraft! Aliens! What have they got to do the beautifully detailed and strategically challenging *Equinox*? There's not a spaceship or alien in sight. Still, ours is not to reason why . . .

So, let's show him, readers! Crumbly wants spaceships, he's going to get spaceships. The most technologically terrific bits of space hardware he's ever likely to clap eyes upon.

What you've got to do is design an alien spaceship, the kind of craft that a visitor might use to travel the interstellar gulf between his world and ours. Let your imagination run riot — give us sleek and shining stratocruisers, or pockmarked and grubby starships with lots of knobbly bits.

The best drawing will get you first prize — all the Amstrad games which the whizzkids at Mikro-Gen have ever released. That's all the Wally games — *Pyjamarama, Everyone's a Wally, Herbert's Dummy Run* and *Three Weeks in Paradise* — plus *Master Chess, Battle of the Planets* and, of course, *Equinox*. That's about 70 quid's worth of software.

Ten runners-up will get copies of *Equinox* too, so get out your wax crayons, felt-tips, finger paints and get cracking - you've only got until June 24.

All drawings should be on sheets no larger than a single page of this magazine (A4, in other words), and don't forget to add your name and address in some kind of legible script.

Send your masterpieces to: STARSHIP EQUINOX, AMTIX! MAGAZINE, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB.



ADVENTURE

THE STORY IN MY HEAD

Hang on a minute. Wait. Ah, that's better. Can't write this intro without having my pointed green hat placed just right. Right? We leprechauns have a reputation to uphold. Why do adventure writers have to be labelled as such? No this isn't another moan about being called a leprechaun — there are worse names, but it does seem that computer adventures are somewhat stereotyped. There are good ideas around as this month's review of *Redhawk* proves, but too few new games explore the potential of the adventure genre. Too many are yet another version of the original Crowther and Woods effort. Many of these games are good in their own right but the adventure buying public are surely open minded enough to accept something truly original once in a while.

There's always plagiarism in computer games but adventures seem to suffer more than most. How many games are there that deal with industrial espionage, political intrigue, surrealist fantasy or professional fulfillment? Not many compared to the constant deluge of Tolkienesque plotlines. Adventures should be more varied. Almost any subject matter you care to think of can be made into a decent adventure given a little time and effort. Arcade games cannot easily offer such potential. Yet even in the midst of shoot em ups and mazes, there are more attempts at new ideas than in adventuring. Hopefully, things will change in time. But with the reluctance of many software houses to really innovate, I suspect the process of change will be a slow one.

If anybody out there has written an adventure (with a utility or from scratch) with the view of just showing or selling it to a few friends, I would be interested in taking a look. If you would like to send your adventures to me at AMTIX! Towers, I'll gladly review them. They might just show the professionals a thing or two. There must be a few people out there with some good ideas and they ought to be brought to the attention of software houses and the public. The sooner the better.

Be Seeing you.

REDHAWK

Melbourne House, £8.95 cass

More often than not, a new adventure game is forced to hack its way into a market place filled with programs that tend to follow a brief but fundamentally immovable set of rules that dictate, to a large extent, the format an adventure should follow. Therefore most move from location to location giving brief descriptions sometimes accompanied by a graphic or two which may be purely decorative or which may give clues to aid in completing the puzzle. These games usually sell or sink depending upon the content of their plots.

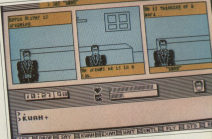
Redhawk is a graphic adventure that breaks into the tiny area of ground left for the wild spirit to cover! It is an interactive cartoon strip. Each direction or action command understood brings up a new frame of a comic strip, acceptably recognisable as such right down to the speech bubbles. These contain scrolling messages, words spoken by the various characters and which are randomly chosen from a situation library. All comic strips must have a hero, and you play Kevin Oliver, something of a wimp in your unaltered ego, but fantasy can turn you into the super being, Redhawk. What you type in on the keyboard is faithfully represented in Kevin or Redhawk's speech bubble, allowing you to add your own personality to the frames.

The scenario is as follows: Not only is Kevin Oliver a wimp but, worse still, he's a wimp who wakes up in hospital to discover that he's lost his memory and would like to go home now please. Unfortunately, not having his house keys or even remembering where his house is, he can only potter around the hospital in a much bemused state. What can he do? All he has in his pockets is £4.00 and a camera with no film. Suddenly he remembers KWAH, which just confuses the man a little more.

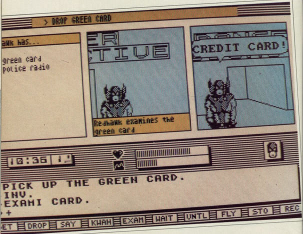
'Kwah?' he says absently, and then to befuddle him still more a startling metamorphosis takes place. Luckily, he doesn't turn green and become a bulky super hero. No, Kevin turns red and becomes the flying Redhawk. Saying 'Kwah' returns him to his docile Kevin personna and the plot begins tentatively to unfold.

Redhawk is played in realtime and an on-screen clock gently ticks away the minutes whilst schizophrenic Kevin/Redhawk alternately walk and fly around the environment. The actual object of the game is not stated and a lot of fun is to be gained from tottering around the city using the usual keyboard directions. Trying to find something to do whilst under the reasonably protective guise of super hero is obvious enough so a little baddie bashing may arrest Redhawk's imagination as long as he's got his costume on.

So much for his day job running around battling for recognition as a fighter of evil (his popularity rating is displayed on a scale). Unfortunately, super hero-ing is heavy work and Red-

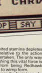


Kevin Oliver is a wimp, but even failed human beings can say 'KWAH' and turn into the super hero REDHAWK. These two screens from the demo show the comic strip action frames. In the centre below the frames are two bars, the top is for your stamina as Redhwak and the lower bar indicates your popularity rating.



hawk's limited stamina depletes at a rate relative to the action being undertaken. The only way of replenishing this vital force is to swap from being Redhawk and return to wimp form.

Following in the footsteps of a certain well known senior super hero, it gradually dawns that being possessed of a camera upon arriving at Fleet Street, there may be doors open to a new career as a cub photographer with a newspaper. The job security also provides a source of income with which to pay train and taxi fares, thus allowing Kevin to travel around the city to his various Redhawk commissions.



hat's about all you need to know about the plot as just getting started can be a long process. All the action takes place on screen in a series of three cartoon type boxes, reading from left to right. The game is very logical in approach and follows a city model faithfully with a wry humour. But the real novelty of *Redhawk* lies in its real-time aspect. Although not initially difficult to map, the major concern is the timing of events making Kevin and Redhawk into real clockwatchers.

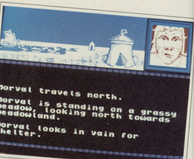
This intriguing and novel package is well worth the £8.95. It's entertaining, intelligent, colourful with an atmosphere you can cut with a knife. Humour pervades everything right down to the irritating people who populate the game and their failure to take super heroism all that seriously (Rehawk is rudely mis-named 'Redsparrow' or 'Red Bus' as he flits across the city skyline). With its tongue in cheek Marvel comic heroism, this game is worth every penny of a crimebuster's meagre spending money.

Atmosphere 94%
Plot 87%
Interaction 97%
Lastability 90%
Value for money 93%
Overall 94%

AN AMTIX! ACCOLADE

RUNESTONE

Firebird, £7.95, cass



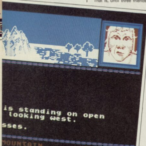
Runestone's history is a long and varied one, having originally been developed for release by Games Workshop during its early excursions into the home software market.

After that company had a sudden change of heart and retreated to the fold of the dice-rolling fraternity, it looked as if the game might never see the light of day again. However, Firebird has finally come to the rescue and has not only re-released it on the Spectrum but converted it for the pleasure of Amsters all over the UK. The game forms part of the 'Hot' range and therefore (?) comes packaged in a square red box. Inside, apart from the cassette, there two ornate maps and an attractively printed rules booklet.

After a brief two-page introduction and another five pages of scene-setting text, the manual finally begins talking about the game. The game is set in the land of Belorn. Man had lived and prospered in the land for hundreds of years before hordes of Orcs from an unknown land to the north began their attacks on the human villages. Humans had already 'evolved' into forest dwelling elves, academic wizards and common men and although the three groups were united against their enemy, they were so outnumbered that they each faced extinction.

That is, until three friends, a warrior, a wizard and an elf met together to hear of the wizard's recent dreams. Through his dreams, the wizard had become aware of the evil force behind the orcs — Kordomir — and had also learned of a way to defeat him, by seeking out a legendary wizard's book and something called the Runestone, a device of great power, available only at the time of Belorn's greatest crisis. Well, unlikely it might have sounded but it was the only chance they had.

The player controls these central characters throughout the game. To change from one character to another, the command 'Change' is typed. To indirectly control another character, it is possible to begin a command with the words 'Tell,' 'Say'or 'Ask.' Which leads me on to the parser. Although only the first three letters of each word are understood, flexibility is gained from the fact that we are freed from the age old verb-noun syndrome, the bane of many an adventurer. Not that this is so new of course, but it is satisfying to see new games taking advantage of more sophisticated means of interaction. If there has to be a criticism, it must be levelled at the vocabulary which is a little on the small side.



The player sees the game as three segments on the screen. At the top is a graphics window (itelf split into two sections). The main part of the window displays the view of the currently controlled character whilst the remainder of the window actually displays the face of the character concerned. Some of the facial animations and expressions are most effective and help lend atmosphere. How much they help the player is a matter not at all clear to me and I suspect they could be purely aesthetic qualities. The graphic view is kept in simple two colour mode but the details are well drawn and when a character

approaches something, there is the effect of zooming in on an area.

The middle part of the screen is taken up with the text display where responses to recent actions scroll into view each turn (and scroll off the top again) and the bottom area is reserved for text input by the player. The character set used is very attractive while still remaining legible.

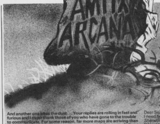
Actually, playing the game reminded me very much of *Lords of Midnight*. The game may not be quite so massive in terms of territory covered, but it more than makes up for this in atmosphere. If the plot is a little hackneyed, the action and presentation compensate admirably. Don't get me wrong, I think to have such excellent techniques lavished on a rather dated plot has to be a little disappointing but 'it's not what you do but the way you do it that counts.'

The puzzles are interesting, the gameplay varied and the plot coherent. Because the time passes whether or not the player interacts with any of his characters, it is advisable to keep changing from one personality to another . . . or someone could fall foul of a fate worse than death without you even knowing. Complex character juggling however is not required and a player soon realises that the same guidelines for character management in *Lords of Midnight* apply here. There is none of the strategy of *LOM* in that there are no massive armies to build (so far as I have seen) but logical use of each of your character's abilities is going to help you go a long way to winning the game.

One occasionally annoying feature is the way that after certain moves, text appears on the screen only to scroll off again at lightning speed. I'm not the fastest reader in the world but I defy most people to read that fast. In fact, the information that is sometimes lost in this fashion is not very important as it is usually a repeat of something you have had a chance to read before. In which case I think it's sloppy to allow this rather pointless activity to occur.

Gripes over with. I like this one. It should keep you happy for quite some time. It has been a long wait (for the review copy, let alone the game itself) but it has been worthwhile. I just wished I had the time to delve deeper into the game and find out what the Runestone does . . . but I suspect that such rewards will be very hard won.

Atmosphere 90%
Plot 78%
Interaction 90%
Lastability 92%
Value for money 91%
Overall 91%



And another one bites the dust . . . Your replies are rolling in fast and furious and I must thank those of you who have gone to the trouble to communicate. For some reason, far more maps are arriving than we can possibly use. So if there's any delay with the map printing, you know why. And while we're on the subject of maps, here are some tips on how to present them.

As I said in the first Arcana, don't worry if your artistic abilities are minimal. Just keep the maps simple and digramatic and we can sort out the rest. People who send in their maps on one side of an A5 piece of letter paper probably won't have their maps printed. A4 (the size of the pages in this magazine) is a much better format. Please use only one side of the paper for the map (though more than one sheet may be used if necessary) and use a key or 'legend' where possible. If you have the ability to draw more than a series of interconnected boxes, please use a hard pencil and/or black ink from artist's pens. Good luck.

Right then, this month we have managed to acquire a map for *Runestone* reviewed elsewhere in this issue. How's that for speed? For those of you who have written asking for help with *Message from Andromeda*, the complete solution is listed below. And of course there are the usual pleading, moaning, grumbling letters . . .

FROM THE PA(REN)THETIC SCHOOL OF CREEPING LETTERS

Dear Sean,
After reading your April column, I noticed that there was a definite lack of letters. So, in the spirit of pure benevolence, I thought I'd write in just to add some variety to the column.

Myself and a few colleagues produce a bi-monthly adventure zine called Glamdring. Most of our copies are sold by mail order (we actually have a reader in Portugal) and as many adventurers will know, it's hard to find a magazine with a good, long adventure column in it. We think that a big (40 page) adventure fanzine would go down well with your readers. As soon as the latest edition is hot off the presses, we'll send you a copy to review. You could say this letter (which I hope you will print: it took a hell of a long time to type) is a warning.

As for the Help-an-adventurer-stuck-in-a-jam campaign, our zine has its very own Rusty Blade (tm) helpline and anyone wishing to take advantage of its free services will have to buy the zine for details! I would like to point out that this zine is non-profit making and costs 50p (inc postage) and anyone who would like a copy (or send material — we need it) should write to:—
GLAMDRING, John Manifold, 1 High St, Ulceby, South Humberside, DN39 6TG. Or they can wait for you (All Hail Sean Masterson) to review it (recommending it, I'm sure), just to make sure they're getting their money's worth.
Yours (thinking your column's great),
John Manifold, South Humberside

P.S. I liked Al-Strad. Anyone who includes an explanation of the word Glamdring in their order will get a collector's edition at no extra charge!

I look forward (with bated breath and lots of paretheses) to anything that feeds my ever growing ego. Incidentally, you may like to know that our all-smiling, all-dancing Hanna Smith wouldn't mind seeing a copy either. She will be taking occasional glimpses of what's available on the fanzine front in our sister publication, CRASH. An adventure fanzine knows no boundaries, you know . . .
SM

Dear Sean,
I need help with *Robin of Sherwood* by Adventure International. What I want to know is how do you get into Kirklees Abbey. How do you get Friar Tuck to follow you and how do you get into Castle de Belleme without 'the evil forces of Azeal' grabbing you?
David Kirkwood, no address given

All very pertinent questions. Er, I don't really know. Anybody got any ideas?
SM

OVERCOMING THE BOREDOM

Allo me 'ole Oirish leprechaun, I be sending you some tips. They be for *Bored of the Rings*.
1: **ULIVHG SLFHV**
2: **TL HJFZHS Z WDZIU**
3: **LMDZIWH GSVB NFHG GIZEVO**
Sceptical: **HXVKGRXZO KOVZHV OVG NV RM**

Don't ask me for help. I cheated and hacked to find 'em. Now I wonts some 'elp. Dat nasty ole barrow-wright 'as me cornered in its lair. How do I get the Hippy (Tom) to rescue me? Dis is in *Lord of the Rings*. Also, any 'elp with *Mindshadow* would be desirable. 'Ow the b****y h**l do I get off the island. I've started doing naughty things to the trees!
Stuart Bruce, Cleator, Cumbria

First of all, could people be so kind as to write to me in English? It would make my life so much easier . . . Second of all, I can't help you just yet on LOM *but I'm in the process of collecting tips for next issue so keep your eyes peeled. Lastly, here's how to stop abusing trees in Mindshadow.* **TVG HGIZD (UILN SFG). TVG HGVVO (UILN YLZG). TVG ILXP (UILN XZEV). WILK HGIZD** *on the beach. Then* **YZMT ILXP** *and hope for the best.*
SM

A LONG MESSAGE FROM ANDROMEDA

Dear Sean,
I have the complete solution to Interceptor's *Message from Andromeda* step by step, from the beginning. Here it is.
IVZW NVHHZTV and reply **BVH. OZMW. LKVM ZRIOLXP** then **OVZEV.** Now you are on the landing pad, go **V.V.H. TVG TOLEVH. M.V. TVG PMRUV. H.H.D.D. TVG WVGLMZGLI. D. TVG ILW. V.V.V** and you should end up in the Mirrored Room.

KLRMG ILW ZG KOZGV. H. WILK ILW. GFIM HKSVIV. TVG HKSVIV. M.D.D.D.M.M.D.H. HSLLG TFZIW. H. KFG HKSVIV LM WRHS. GFIM HKSVIV. WLDM. V. WLDM. XFG ERMV. V.V. This is a maze. If you keep going **MLIGS**, you will end up where you started from. So go **MLIGS** about four times. If you meet an alien soldier, **PROO SRN DRGS KRHGLO. V** until you reach the damp cave. The alien soldier may appear here. **V.** If the soldier appears here, follow the advice given above. Then **LKVM WLLI. TVG VCKOLHREVH. D.D.D.H.H. IVZW DIRGRMT** (and remember it). **D.D.D.H.H.D. FK. V. WILK VCKOLHREVH. D. KIVHH YFGGLM LM WVGLMZGLI. V.V.**

TVG ZCV. D.D.D. WLDM. V.V. M.M.M.M. V until you get to the lower store room. **WLDM. H.V. SDRN. H. DVZI TOLEVH. WILK WVGLMZGLI. TVG UFMTFH. M.D.M.D. GSILD UFMTFH ZG HOFT. D.D. XFG ILKV. TVG HGLMVH. D.D. WLDM. F. GSILD. HGLMVH ZG XIVZGFIV. V.H. PROO XLNNZMWVI DRGS ZCV. TVG PVB. V. RMHVIG PVB RM PVBSLOV. GFIM PVB. GBKV LOW. D. VMGVI WVERXV. KIVHH YFGGLM. OVZEV. M.M.M. VMGVI HSRK. XOLHV ZRIOLXP. GZPV LUU.** You have now completed *Message from Andromeda*.
B Ahmad, London

Now that was a mouthful. Thanks very much Mr Ahmad and congratulations. You are this month's software winner and Aunt Aggie will be sending off a copy of Lord of the Rings *very soon indeed.*
SM

PRACTICE PROBLEMS

Dear Amtix!
I am a devoted fan of *Sorcery Plus* which has kept me up until the early hours of the morning on many occasions. I am now quite adept at releasing all eight sorcerors without any difficulty, but as soon as I reach the second part of the game, I run out of energy with surprising speed. At this point, the screen tells me that the practice mode is now available but DOES NOT TELL ME HOW TO PRACTICE!

Seeing how you wrote such a lovely review of this wonderful but rather irritating game, please let me know how to access the pratice mode. I am very worried about the Necromancer and feel that he should be dealt with as soon as possible. Would it help if I said that I love the magazine? I do subscribe to it!
M Funnel, Norwich, Norfolk

And so you should subscribe to this wonderful journal. Actually Mr Funnel, your letter is typical of several we have received regarding this matter. Although the instructions for the game fail to give you the information you require, a quick phone call to Virgin this morning, rectified the situation. At the start of the game (not the start of the second part), press the C key down and then the fire button. When you reach the second half of the game, the pratice mode should be available without any difficulty.
SM

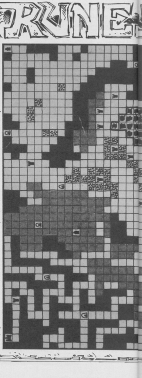
LORDS OF TIME

Here are some more tips from the irrepressible Mike Wong (who has sent in enough material to keep me busy for a long time yet).
Zone 1

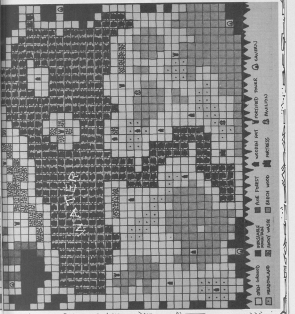
To cross the stream **GRV GSV KOZMPH GLTVGSVI.** To get the lodestone **TREV OLLPRMT TOZHH GL MZIXRHHFH.** To get the keys from under the shed **FHV GSV OLWVHGLMV.** Then unlock the shed. To get the diamond teardrop **XFG WLDM GIVV MVZI HGIVZN (DRGS ZCV). XZIIB TOLD-DLIN** to provide light.

Right. That's yer lot for this month. Keep sending in the letters, maps and tips. I will use as many as possible in the months to come. Don't forget, the cassette game of your choice is up for grabs to whoever sends in the most useful or interesting item of the month. Despite the fact that the *Red Moon* **map failed to appear this issue (my fault, I didn't give Oli enough time), we should be able to print it next month. Keep your fingers crossed.**

Before I depart once and for all, I should thank one of our hyperactive advertising minions, Nick Wild. He's an adventure freak (and has completed more games than I've had mushroom soup dinners) who has been helping me out on some of your more obscure questions. Ah well, and I thought all the credit would be going to me. Meanwhile, anything you feel may be of interest, send it to:
AMTIX! ARCANA
PO BOX 10
LUDLOW
SHROPSHIRE
SY8 1AQ



STONE BELORN AND THE FROZEN WASTES



NEWS

MUD FLIES AS SIR CLIVE AND SUGAR FIGHT IT OUT

Mystery and controversy surrounds the £5 million takeover of Sinclair Research by Amstrad.

The takeover was announced at a press conference on April 7, where it was stated that Amstrad had bought the worldwide rights to sell and manufacture all existing and future Sinclair computers, together with the Sinclair brand name and those intellectual property rights relating to computers and computer related products.

At the conference Sir Clive Sinclair put a brave face on the decision to sell off his company, acknowledging that he was handing over to 'expert international marketeers', while Amstrad boss Alan Sugar confirmed that one of the first casualties would be Sinclair's ill-fated QL computer and that Amstrad intended to introduce a new version of the Spectrum 128 later in the year, with a built-in datacorder.

It is concerning the future of Sinclair's planned Pandora computer that Sinclair and Sugar have exchanged accusations and recriminations. Alan Sugar has stressed that Sinclair would not be marketing the Pandora itself, and added, ominously, that 'Pandora will not exactly be what Sinclair conceived it to be.' When asked by *Computer Trade Weekly* whether Amstrad would be implementing MS-DOS on Pandora, Sugar replied: 'I'd go for an elastic band and a propellor. I'm not saying what we'd go for.'

Sir Clive has lashed out at this, insisting that his company will be ploughing ahead with the Pandora and that Amstrad had turned down the chance to market the machine. 'Alan Sugar is not a man who innovates products,' Sinclair said, and went on 'I wouldn't rule it out that we'll be doing it ourselves.'

Mud-slinging aside, it appears that the marketing of Sinclair computers will run in parallel with that of the Amstrad computers with Sinclair covering the entertainment end of the market and Amstrad catering for the step up, more serious home units and business machines.

The takeover by Amstrad, coming almost exactly two years after its entry into the computer market, consolidates its worldwide position and will enable it to penetrate those specialist market sectors which Sinclair has traditionally dominated. It signifies the end of an era in which Sir Clive Sinclair's name went hand-in-hand with cheap home computers.

PLAYERS PLEASE?

Richard Jones of **Interceptor** was at the CES show, proud to be launching a new budget label — **Players**. Players games will sell for £1.99 retail, and the range kicks off on 29th April with sixteen titles for the popular machines — six of the games in the initial packet of releases are for the Amstrad.

With luck, we should be taking a look at the Players in the next issue — Richard had examples of the packaging and a very neat promotional video on his CES stand, but no games running so we couldn't get a sneak preview organised in time for these pages! Lots of work has gone into the packaging design as well as the software, Richard assures us, and the new Interceptor venture aims to catch a significant share of the budget market.

Bigtop Barney, *Nuclear Heist*, *Magic Maths*, *Killapede*, *Trollie Wallie* and *Magic Clock* are the Players games for Amsters to look out for.



Richard Jones of Interceptor and now Players is seen here dancing the light fantastic at the CES show at the launch of his new label. As you can see, staying alive ion the software business is a case of knowing how to keep all your balls in the air at the same time.

SPARKS FLY

In a move aimed at drawing all its distribution activities under one roof **Creative Sparks Distribution** has moved into a new high-tech office and warehouse development at the Southwood Summit Centre in Farnborough. The new address is Unit B11, Southwood Summit Centre, Southwood, Farnborough, Hampshire GU14 0NP and the telephone number is 0252 522200.

HIP TO THE BEAT

Cheetah Marketing, flushed with the success of their Drum synthesiser for the Spectrum, exhibited the first production sample of the Amstrad version, wittily called the *Amdrum*.

Sadly their sound sampler and MIDI interface were not ready in time for the show, but the syncopated rhythms issuing from the Amdrummed Amstrad on their stand had the joint jumping.

Priced at £34.95, the *Amdrum* allows you to piece together drum tracks from sampled drum sounds supplied in software and is a faithful conversion of the successful Spectrum implementation. Once again, a full review should follow next issue - but Amsters will have to wait until July before the MIDI Interface and sound sampler, priced at £49.95 and £44.95 respectively, hit the streets.

POCKET MONEY WORDSTAR?

The Amstrad version of the classic word processing program *Wordstar* has had its price dramatically slashed.

Pocket Wordstar, from **MicroPro**, now costs only £49.95. It is available for the Amstrad 6128, the PCW8256 and 8512, as well as the 464 and 664.

Robin Oliver, managing director of MicroPro (UK), is optimistic: 'MicroPro set a lead in pricing policy with the launch of the original *Wordstar* back in 1978 . . . *Pocket Wordstar* is aggresively priced at £49.95 and we believe that this will ensure that we maintain and improve our position in the low-end market.'

MicroPro can be contacted at Haygarth House, 28-31 High Street, Wimbledon Village, London SW19 5BY. Tel: 01-879 1122

BIGGLES GETS HIS ACT TOGETHER

Biggles, the multipart arcade/strategy game, was previewed by **Mirrorsoft** at the Consumer Electronics and Computer Show in London last month.

As previously revealed in AMTIX! the game is the result of a unique collaboration between three software developers, a music programmer, and Mirrorsoft. It is linked to specific sequences in the feature film. Each of the game parts must be completed to achieve a final objective, but it is nowhere near as simple as it sounds! Whenever you reach a certain critical stage, you are likely to find yourself hurtled through time into a totally different scenario, requiring different playing skills.

In the first part of the game, you pilot your biplane, carefully avoiding ground and air attack, to locate and photograph the enemy's secret weapon. Watch out for Von Stahlein on your tail!

Then you must find your way through treacherous trenches and a secret network of caves, defending yourself with a pistol and grenades, to the weapon test site. Finally you have to escape the police helicopter, SAS hit squads, and armed police in a death-defying rooftop chase.

The second part of the game, on the flip side of the tape, is a strategic adventure where you pilot your modern police helicopter across the Western Front, destroy the secret weapon, and rescue your friends who are trapped behind enemy lines.

The game will sell at £9.95 on cassette and £14.95 on disk and should be available around the middle of June.

FIREBIRD SET TO IGNITE THE ADVENTURE WORLD



The main contract signing extravaganza of the CES show involved British Telecom's self proclaimed 'leading edge' label, Firebird, and adventure masters Level 9.

Pictured here, gathered round the contract signing table on the Level 9 stand, are **Tony Rainbird** and **Paula Byrne** from Firebird and three members of the Austin family tying up the deal.

Rainbird will be marketing selected Level 9 products in this country and in the USA — the first of which is to be a revamped version of the *Colossal Adventure*, *Dungeon Adventure* and *Adventure Quest* trilogy. Before long, Amstrad owners (including word processing fiends who sit behind the 8256 keyboards) should be able to exchange £19.95 for a Rainbird box containing the trilogy on disk and accompanying documentation.

The Level 9 team are currently hard at work adding graphics to the trilogy and improving the language parser used in the original versions of the three adventure programs. A second multi-load adventure, provisionally titled *Knight Orc*, should be ready for release on the Rainbird label during September and a third Rainbird/Level 9 release is scheduled for December this year.

●The agreement between Rainbird and Level 9 allows the Austin's to continue as an independent software house, writing and marketing adventures under the Level 9 label — *The Price of Magik* is virtually complete, and should find its way into the shops at the end of April.

DATA PROTECTION GETS AGONY UNCLE

If organisations hold on to computer lists of authors of the books they stock or on to lists of sports goods endorsed by famous sports personalities should they register under the Data Protection Act which is now in force?

These are a couple of the intriguing questions the Data Protection Register is being asked.

To answer these, and other knotty problems, the Data Protection Registrar, Eric Howe, has published a set of answers in a useful booklet. Along with answering questions about organisations keeping records of products with names like **Heinz** or **Ford** the latest set of questions and answers further examines the holding of data for payroll, pensions and accounts purposes. It is important these users check their situations carefully to see if they are exempt.

Other questions answered include: how does the Act affect modern telephones which store the number of individuals? What is the position as regards telex and facsimile machines? How does the Act apply when personal data is disclosed during maintenance of computer hardware or software? How should a partnership be registered? Who actually is the data user?

Copies of the questions and answers booklet are available free of charge from the Office of the Data Protection Registrar, Springfield House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AX.

CES — THE PITS?

THE CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW, held at London's Olympia during the last full week of April, was a bit of a damp squib as far as the home computer industry was concerned. Only a handful, albeit a fairly large handful, of software and hardware companies exhibited at the show, which was a quiet, slow paced affair according to most observers.



The Dishy prospect that greeted visitors to the Consumer Electronics Show at Olympia. Sadly, the home computer industry took a raincheck on the proceedings.

Amongst the names included in the show guide were **Mirrorsoft** who brought *Biggles* along to the Press Day and demo'd early versions of *Biggles*, *Dynamite Dan II* and **Reflex**, and **Rainbird**, who used the show to announce tie-ins with both **Level 9** and **Magnetic Scrolls** (a company specialising in adventures written for 68000 based machines). **Beyond** was the only other wing of British Telecom present — **Firebird** stayed at home on the nest for the duration of the show. **Mastertronic, Mikro-Gen, Durell, Cheetah Marketing**, and **Bubble Bus** also took exhibition space — expect a budget version of *Space Invaders* for the Amstrad on the MiniBus label soon, as well a a full price conversion of Steve Crow's game *Starquake*.

Very little in the way of new home computer product was in evidence: Amstrad stayed away, even though their range of Consumer Electronics equipment is much wider than home computers. Sir Clive Sinclair was spotted in a show bar on one occasion . . . was it telecommunications that brought him to the show? The most popular area of activity was Satellite Television — half a dozen companies were pointing giant dishes into the ether, plucking out foreign TV broadcasts for the amusement of visitors to the show. One lady spent most of her time chucking the contents of ashtrays and cat litter boxes onto a square of carpet and vacuuming the mess back up, while row upon row of slick telephones looked on from their niches on other stands. It looks like the **Personal Computer World Show** in September is still going to be the Big One . . .

MICRONET PLAYS IT SAFE

Warning: some modems can seriously damage your health!

Micronet 800 has issued a statement outlining its future policy with regard to advertising modems on its database. In future the company is to adopt a policy of advertising modems which carry BABT/BT approval only.

Advertisements for modems which do not carry approval will be rejected, until certificates have been made available for clarification.

Micronet has decided to take this step because of the confusion which currently surrounds modems which are not approved. They are being sold to customers who are unaware they risk prosecution or face possible injury from such equipment. The company hopes its lead will be followed by others.

A NEW GENERATION OF VIRGINS

Virgin Games has acquired all rights to **New Generation**'s back catalogue as well as rights to seven new games due to be released in coming months.

Commented Nick Alexander, managing director of Virgin Games, 'I have been a fan of New Generation software since my first days in the business when I saw their ZX81 programs at Microfairs. We have both come a long way since then and I look forward to further progress.'

DOOMDARK'S REVENGE ON ITS WAY!

Beyond has released news of the follow-up to the award-winning *Lords of Midnight*. Entitled *Doomdark's Revenge* it was developed by *Midnight* author, **Mike Singleton**, who has enhanced his unique landscaping techniques that were first seen in the *Midnight* game. The new program consists of over 6,000 locations and some 48,000 views.

Doomdark's Revenge is an adventure/war game set in a fantasy medieval world.Although the game is an adventure which responds to the player's action in the form of text set on a new landscape scene, no text input is required. Instead all possible moves can be made by pressing one key only.

To successfully complete your adventure you must manipulate whole armies and explore to the full the vast land of Midnight. You can travel in eight directions at any one time and you can ask for more information about an object, an event or individual.

Enjoyment of *Doomdark's Revenge* is not restricted to the computer as enclosed with the game is an audio cassette. Set to music, the cassette is an exciting dramatisation of the events leading up to the beginning of the game and makes an excellent introduction.

The Amstrad version should be on sale next month and will cost £9.95.

LENSLOKED LEVEL 9

How's this for a beginning to an adventure game?

'Rummaging in the attic, you discover a wrinkled balloon with tiny white writing, too small to make out. Intrigued, you blow and the balloon swells like a red globe. Then it bursts.

'As the echoes fade, you re-open your eyes and look in astonishment upon a bleak landscape of mist and swamp. Writing glimmers in the darkness: Welcome to the House of the Red Moon.

Fans will probably recognise the style and imagination of the classic adventure writers, **Level 9**, and thus begins their sequel to the hugely popular *Red Moon*, *The Price of Magik*.

Like its predecessor, the game involves spells and



combat routines, though there are more spells than before and there is a bigger vocabulary. Also, for the first time there are fully independent creatures.

The aim is to achieve status in the hierarchy by becoming master sorceror, while avoiding the consequences. As Level 9 hint darkly, 'You become a better magician as your sanity declines . . . It is the real price of magic.'

The game is the first from Level 9 to use the controversial Lenslok security device, which caused such initial problems when it was implemented on Firebird's *Elite*. The company is not discouraged, however. A spokesman says: 'We believe it is the security currently available, and all the retailers we've spoken to welcome it. We've implemented it very carefully, and if we're happy with the results, we'll use it again.'

The game will be available for the Amstrad shortly. And the price of *The Price of Magik*? Your sanity, and £9.95.

SOFTWARE BREEDING FOR THE AMX MOUSE

More and more people in the Amstrad micro market are developing a liking for mice, particularly the AMX version!

Software houses are ensuring their programs are compatible with the AMX Mouse and in recent months *Mini Office 2* from Database Software and the Mouse Graphics program from Electric Studio have been written with the Mouse in mind.

Nick Pearson, managing director of manufacturers Advanced Memory Systems of Warrington, says the AMX Mouse has been a runaway success and people will always back a winner. 'That's why more and more people are producing software for our mouse, serving to complement our own range. I also know of at least four other companies busy developing mouse software,' he adds.

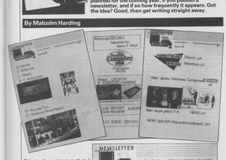
The AMX Mouse software includes AMX Art, AMX Utilities, AMX Pagemaker, and AMX 3D Zicon with more planned.

AMTIX! USER CLUB NEWS



Welcome once again to the regular column for user clubs and bulletin board users. As you should know by now the aim of the page is to allow the aforementioned to have printed space to write about themselves, notify members and future members of coming special events, offer advice and help to newly formed or planned organisations, and generally have the opportunity to sound off about anything and everything. AMTIX! wants to hear from user clubs the length and breadth of Britain and indeed we would welcome correspondence from organisations abroad. Write and tell us how, why and when you set up the club, its aims, when and where it meets, how many members you have, any special events you have planned for the coming year, if you publish a newsletter, and if so how frequently it appears. Got the idea? Good, then get writing straight away.

By Malcolm Harding



This month we travel south to spotlight a user club in Seaton, Devon. The club was the brainchild of Christopher Bryant who started the club both to give other Amstrad owners in the area the chance to share ideas and also to help Christopher relieve the boredom of being unemployed.

At present the club boasts about 25 members and it is interesting to see the newsletters put out by the club do not contain any games reviews because members do not want them! It's also interesting to note that many members are interested in Adventure games!

Chris tells me his club started back in June, 1984 and after two trial issues of a news-sheet he decided to go all out for a user club. At the moment his main aim is to produce a newsletter every six weeks which is called the **Amstrad Computing Newsletter**. At present members are charged 75p per newsletter or £1.75p for three issues, Chris's aim being to cover publishing costs and not make any profit. He hopes to issue nine newsletters this year with the year's subscription for members being about £5.25p. One of the latest successes of the club has been to negotiate a 20 per cent discount deal with **OJ Software** of Wigan in Lancashire, providing members buy three or more games at a time.

WARNING FROM CHRIS

Chris also told me of an apparent rip off concerning a club called **Amsbit** who advertised in a weekly computer magazine last year. The address in the advertisement was Essential Consultants Limited, Second Floor, 5 Russell Street, Gloucester GL1 1NE. He sent a cheque for £14.95 to the club and then waited and waited . . . and waited. After six weeks his cheque had been cashed but he had received nothing from the club so he decided to ring and make a few enquiries. The voice at the end of the telephone said 'Essential Consultants Limited' and he asked if it was possible to speak to someone connected with **Amsbit**. The lady said there was no-one there connected with such a company and rang off but a couple of days later he received a newsletter.

Since then he had heard nothing else about the club and he was unhappy to put it mildly. 'I wonder if any other AMTIX! readers have come across this club and if so have they had any more success than me?' asked Chris. His strong advice to anyone thinking of sending off for membership to **Amsbit** was 'don't'. He also suggested never sending off money to any organisation unless you make enquiries first.

Anyone living in the Seaton area of Devon who wants to join Chris's club can contact him at his home address or by ringing 0297-20456.

COMPUTER CLUBS ASSOCIATION DENIED ACCESS

The organisers of a recent Sunderland computer show incurred the wrath of both the Association of Computer Clubs and local computer clubs last month, after refusing to allow them to have free stands at the event.

In a letter to me, Simon Porritt of the Amstrad User Software Database Club in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, said exhibition organisers need to do more to encourage the public's attendance at shows. Local and national clubs do a lot to foster appreciation of computers and the useful tasks they can perform, and show organisers should take heed of the role clubs play in getting people involved in computing and along to exhibitions.

He said the problem had been highlighted when the organisers of the North East Micro Computer Exhibition at Sunderland said they were unable to sponsor a free stand for the ACC and local affiliates, AUSD, Computer Town North East, and the North East Amstrad User Group, all of which are voluntary organisations. Apparently the organisers took the attitude that it was a commercial event and as such they intended selling all the stands to commercial organisations. They suggested the clubs seek a sponsor.

"Perhaps the organisers are so busy trying to make money they have lost sight of what shows are all about, or perhaps Amsoft is not doing so well. Let's hope the ACC and the local clubs have more luck next time," Simon commented.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE AMSCLUB SAGA

My recent comments and advice regarding the Lanarkshire-based AMSCLUB has prompted a couple of letters in support of the organisation, one of them from the former owner, David Baxter, who, as reported in last ▶

AMTIX! USER CLUB NEWS

month's issue, has been taken over by the Oxfordshire based Advantage Computer User Group. The other letter comes from Steve Brokenshire of South Humberside. Both are printed in full, the first from Mr Baxter.

'It's funny how they shoot you down, when your hands are held on high', the Alarm.

In reply to your cutting attack on Amsclub in your last issue, I must have the chance to reply. Amsclub was started way back in November 1984 and Mr Coutanche is the first person to have formally complained to a magazine, TWICE. Mr Coutanche did indeed send his membership application to Amsclub in November of last year and he had to write to me to chase up his application. When he wrote to me he said that if he didn't receive his membership items within 10 days he would send a nasty letter to some magazines.

He even enclosed a sample of the letter (forward thinking Eh!). As soon as I received his letter I sent his membership items (tape magazine, newsletter, software/hardware catalogue) to him by return of post. Several weeks passed and I heard nothing from him therefore I thought everything was fine at his end. Then one of his super duper 'nasty' letters made an appearance on the letters page of Popular Computing Weekly. I replied to his letter and PCW were kind enough to print it. I said that if Mr Coutanche got in touch with me I would give him a full refund. Well months passed and Mr Coutanche has still not got in touch with me and I am beginning to think that someone has got it in for me.

As far as I know Mr Coutanche has written to six computer magazines with the same letter, most of which have managed to contact me and have later decided not to print his letter. You said in your small slander piece that you had tried to contact me at my home and I did not have the courtesy to get in touch with you. I do recollect my father passing on a message to me (in a somewhat cryptic way, not being a computer person he didn't have a clue who AMTIX! was) but as no telephone number was given me, only 'Malcolm Harding from a magazine rang' I could not get in touch with you. At the time nobody even knew you had become the AMTIX! editor so your name did not ring a bell.

Mr Coutanche said he didn't receive a membership pack — just a magazine and a tape, also no introduction. That was his membership pack, and as for 'no explanation', I did explain the situation and also apologised for any inconvenience caused. I hope this letter manages to clean up Amsclub's image a bit after your attack. By the time you read this Amsclub will have been surrendered to the Advantage User Group, thus the lyric at the start of the letter. Amsclub members will now become Advantage members for one year and receive 12 issues of their newsletter, etc. All Amsclub members will hear from Advantage in the coming weeks.

Thanks for your attention and I hope no grudge is held against me. I can assure you I hold no grudges, oh and by the way the name is David not Dave!

Yours David Baxter, ex-Amsclub, 42 Mount Stewart Street, Carluke, Lanarkshire.

Thanks for your letter David. I bear no grudges . . .

MORE STRONG WORDS

The other letter, from Steve Brokenshire, reads as follows: 'I am writing to you at your suggestion following a telephone conversation we had regarding your article on Amsclub. I feel very strongly about the subject as, in my opinion, you appear to have condemned the club completely on the basis of one complaint and two misplaced telephone calls.

Like your Mr Coutanche, I also sent off my cheque to Dave Baxter at Amsclub. I received the cassette and magazine and also could not get the cassette to load. This, I feel, was in all probability due to the fact I have a 6128 which does not have a dedicated cassette. However, unlike Mr C I did not start shouting to the magazines that it was a rip off. Instead I followed what I would call the sensible procedure. I contacted Mr Baxter who, upon hearing of my problem, sent me the information on a disk which I had no problem loading and duly returned it to him.

Since then I have kept up regular correspondence with him and he has been very helpful, supplying me with various bits of information about the machine and generally assisting me to enjoy the use of the machine. It may interest you to know that yours was not the only magazine Mr C wrote to but yours was the only one that I know of which told people to 'steer clear of this organisation' without allowing fair right of reply. In this country you are innocent until proven guilty and just because, to use an analogy, the charges are not read to you, does not mean you should be convicted. If every time somebody made a mistake they were condemned for it your magazine would have gone out of business a long time ago. Just because everything you print is not correct doesn't mean people should steer clear of your magazine.

Getting back to Mr C he should realise that being a member of a user club means joining in, and not expecting everything to be done for you. You suggest that instead of joining Amsclub you join a local user club instead. That is easier said than done as the only group local to me that I am aware of is only interested in cassette-based machines. I did not see any point in joining as I have a disk-based machine. Perhaps you can give me the address of a suitable group local to me as I don't know of one.

On a different tack a few issues ago you had people complaining of *Way of the Exploding Fist* not working on 6128 machines to which your OTS reply was all your copies worked. However, it might help to point out early copies loaded the first part of the program 'Fist' into memory occupied by the disk area so would not work. I can only suggest that later copies have been modified. Also I would like to point out we are aware it costs more to copy onto disk for program sale but obviously you have forgotten that the cost of the cassette and the duplicating of the cassette should be deducted also. I wonder how much it costs to put disks in fancy large cases when they come in very good plastic boxes which will fit into library boxes. Also if there is not a lot of profit in disks why was I able to purchase a copy of *Tank Commander* at the Amstrad Show for only £7 or will you suggest it was sold at a loss so the dealer did not have to carry it back with him?

It is about time manufacturers took the Amstrad disk seriously and supplied what the paying public wanted, instead of accusing us of being pirates and ignoring for the most part our requests. On the subject of reviews you say it would cause an increase in the price of the magazine if this were done. I suggest you contact your rival magazine to see how they manage as they include a 'green screen view' with every review and their magazine costs the same as yours.

Steve Brokenshire, Broughton, Brigg, South Humberside.

An interesting letter Steve. Don't ever fall foul of the law of the land because, in reality, they treat you as guilty until proved innocent. If there is a User Club in South Humberside I hope they will write to you c/o the AMTIX! address.

ACCESSORY SHOP IN MANCHESTER

News has reached me of a new computer and audio accessories shop in Manchester. It is located at 2 Stovell Avenue, Longsight, Manchester and there is special discount for user club members who produce their membership cards before making a purchase. Pop in, if you live in the Manchester area, and tell Steve that Malcolm sent you!

NO CONNECTIONS WITH AMSCLUB

The people behind the National Independent Amstrad User Club, which is based at Wealdstone, Harrow, Middlesex, have asked me to point out they have no connection with Amsclub. Editor, Derek Vernon tells me the new club has grown from the North London Amstrad User Club (which also still exists) and the former has already arranged software and hardware deals with major companies.

PEN PAL LISTINGS

I have had a few requests from readers to start a pen pal list in the magazine. They feel it would be beneficial to correspond with other Amsters. That's fine by me. Anybody want to send in details? The address, as for all other User Club Page correspondence, is Malcolm Harding, AMTIX! User Club Page, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB.

STRATEGY

HOW WONDERFUL TO BE SO PROFOUND

After a short break last month,the software has started coming in again (literally — Gary Mays has just entered the room with a handful of goodies). However, this doesn't stop us from widening our horizons and so Michael Jampel, the only strategist to actually drive a 1/300th scale vehicle, reports back from a wargaming convention in London and shows that such events can be relevant to computer users as well. If you like what you see, let me know and it may be possible to cover more such events.

I wonder (he says, changing the subject with all the subtelty of a steamroller going downhill) how long it will be before the recent troubles over the Libyans results in a game. And how accurate it will be. When I studied history, I was told that so many years had to pass before a subject could really be considered history and not current affairs. There are all kinds of reasons for this but most of them can be can be explained by a government's desire to keep details of such matters under wraps for quite some time (normally around thirty years). After that time, facts tend to come to light which put a situation in a new perspective.

Consider the question marks that still hang over the Vietnam war despite all that has been written on the subject. Although Vietnam has been referred to as the first televised war, there are still unanswered questions pertaining to how certain operations were carried out, why the conflict was resolved in that particular way (some say it was a war lost by politicians rather than soldiers) and of course the whole point of America's involvement has never been clearly realised. How accurate can simulations of recent conflicts ever be? As nobody can answer that point with any degree of conviction, surely the best modern simulations simply offer an alternative by opening up options thta were not available during the conflict itself.

For instance, what if a Falklands wargame allowed the commanders to use high level bombing raids against the Argentinian mainland or commanders in the Libyan attack had used aircraft from the sixth fleet? Both would have changed the outcome of the affair to a certain degree. By allowing such options to the players of a simulation, the question mark is placed in the player's mind about the wisdom of the decisions made in the real conflict. Consequently, strategy games become more of a glorified mind game. And that can't be bad. Can it?

FROM FONTENOY TO FYLINGDALES

Michael Jampel visits SALUTE 86 and finds everything painted red.

On Saturday 12 April, the South London Warlords held Salute 86, a wargames convention in Kensington Town Hall. The attendance was good for this kind of show at around three thousand. But what has this got to do with the Amstrad? As I have tried to demonstrate in previous articles, there is a significant overlap between computing and wargaming. Indeed, for the first time this year, there was a prize for the best computer enhanced wargame at the show, of which more later.

Mentioning the prizes leads me on to one of the main differences between Computer shows (wherever they may be) and wargame conventions — the stands. The stands at a computer show are mostly manned by people trying to make money. There may be one or two clubs, but even they are often selling software or attempting to attract new (paying) members. At a wargames day, there are some trade stands (and those present at Salute were certainly doing good money) but about half the actual space is taken up by wargames.

These fall into two main types, demonstration and participation. The Rayners Lane Club, for example, had an excellent demonstration of the **Battle of Fontenoy** in 1745. Members of the public could watch the events of the battle being played out before them. The model soldiers (about an inch high) were beautifully painted and Charles Grant was gvivng a running commentary on the characters of the French and British troops as well as all other aspects of the fight. Mr Grant is very well read and always interesting to listen to; throughout the day, his stand was surrounded by people of all ages.

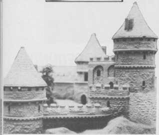


Another interesting demo was of an attack on an American helicopter base in Vietnam. The Vietnamese had tunnelled under the perimeter wire and were causing havoc. A nice touch was that all the participants in the game (organised by the Wet Wickham Wargames Club) were dressed as American conscripts in full camouflage outfit.

There are various scales or sizes of miniatures used in conventional wargaming: Fontenoy used the familiar 1/76th scale (like the Airfix range) but to create a really massive battle, 1/300th scale models are needed. The Empire Club had just such a game running. Their table was six feet wide by fifteen long and each side in this Napoleonic game had five or six players. This helped to simulate a chain of command and the confusion inherent to any large battle. It was an impressive sight.

The second type of game is one in which the public are invited to play. One game was a simple representation of the famous Dambusters bombing attack on German dams during WWII. Again, the organisers were dressed in authentic outfits to add atmosphere. The other two participation games I want to mention were computer moderated. In other words, instead of using a rule book and tables of results, the data (such as the distance between target and firer) was entered into a computer. Models were still used to help picture what was going on and in both cases these games were very interesting to look at. This type of game should not be confused with the totally computer based games such as *Theatre Europe* reviewed here a couple of months ago.

One game was run by the show's hosts, the South London Warlords. One of their



on Fylingdales Early Warning Radar in North Yorkshire. All the terrain and nodels were painted in various shades of red as they would appear through an infra-red night sight. The game was run nine times during the show with four or five members of the public controlling the Soviets and the British being moved by the umpires. The defenders (the RAF regiment) won five times to four.

The rules of the game allowed a map of the table to be displayed or a graph showing each side's losses, on the scren of a sharp micro. All information concerning gun strengths, armour thicknesses etc was contained inside the BASIC program. These rules are part of Tactical Group's 'Project Universal' which aims to create a consistent set of rules for any home micro. The group is quite heavily involved in conputer aspect of wargaming and more details about their activities can be obtained from Sean Masterson at AMTIX!

There were many more conventional stands at Salute dealing with the traditional side of the hobby. Saulte 87 will be held in the same place again in early April. I hope that it will continue to provide an interesting day out for any military enthusiast. Whatever happens in future conventions, the presence of computers is likely to have an even greater influence.

members, Robin Hunt, has written a combat calculator (unfortunately only available for the BBC and Spectrum) for the Spanish civil war of 1936. The buildings and other models were very impressive and the public seemed to get very involved with the fight between the Nationalists and the Republicans. Mr Hunt is certainly one of the leaders in computer assisted wargaming. This stand deserved to win the shield for best computer enhanced game. However, the judges probably wished to appear unbiassed and the eventual winners were the Tactical Group who also put on a good display with a night attack



KAISER

Ariolasoft, £7.95 cass, joystick only

Kaiser involves from one to nine players competing against fate or each other to become Emperor of 18th century Germany.

Each player begins life as a Regent equipped with assets and an estate, which must grow and prosper in order to bring success. The ultimate goal is to build five towns (consisting of five markets and three grain mills), possess at least 25000 hectares of land and have cash assets of 100000 Talers. Lastly, a palace and cathedral must be built. Not only names but gender are required as this becomes relevant to the player's title.

The game takes place in a series of phases which combine to make a yearly turn. During the turn, all options and responses are made via the joystick.

During the first phase, a harvest report arrives and must be dealt with. If the crop has been poor then extra supplies of grain need to be purchased unless you want the population to die. If the harvest has been a bumper one, surplus grain may be sold off at a profit. The option to buy or sell land is also there for consideration. Selling land can bring extra income (if sale prices are judged well). Buying land is also necessary in order to build a palace and cathedral — both of which are required as status symbols during the game.

The next stage of the game is simply a status screen allowing you to study data on birth rate, death rate, revenue from markets and grain mills, army costs and how many people emigrated over the past year. It is purely informative and the game continues on the next screen.

This is where the tax and duty rates are set. Displayed are all the current levels of duty and income from each area (such as VAT) over the previous year. These may be changed by use of the joystick as on all the other screens. Also, the level of justice can be altered to increase income but this can have adverse effects such as emigrations by 'victims of the state.'

Play then proceeds to another information display. A map of your estate is drawn each year showing how many markets exist, how many mills are producing corn, how far building of the palace and cathedral have progressed and size of the army. The map may be scrolled, rather crudely across the screen. The diagrammatic information displayed on the map is clear and useful but rather unambitious visually. Again, after study the next stage of the game may be accessed.

With this year's revenue displayed at the top of the screen, there is now the option to decide how to spend it. New mills and markets are the cheapest form of expenditure as they bring in an income from the next turn onwards. On the other hand a start could be made building the palace (the instructions suggest the palace is built before the cathedral).

Money could even be spent on the military. If a solo game is being played, this area is apparently inaccessible, so you can't fight a war with the computer. However, if a game does have more than one player, then armies can be bought (with the option of readily trained but expensive mercenaries available), sent out on manoeuvres and of course, sent to war with another nation. No matter how many players are involved, an army always has to be maintained at some level and consequently, is always a financial burden.

Once an army goes to war, a whole new game appears. Again it is totally joystick oriented and through a series of prompts, forces may be deployed or put into action — whatever you require. Throughout a battle and at the end of the war, details of losses are made available. Fighting wars is definitely a costly business in terms of manpower but it will drastically increase the amount of land owned if successful.

After military matters have been resolved, the game returns to the first phase one year on. However, if the turn has been a particularly good one, a new rank in the aristocracy will be given to you with the trapping of extra land that comes with it. On a more sombre note, the computer may decide you have gracefully passed away due to old age.

This is the singular major random factor in the game. Automatically set at the start of the game, it is the same for all players but there is no way of knowing when it will occur. The only thing that can aid you to a long life is the speed at which each turn is dealt with. The game contains a monitoring system which calculates how quickly different matters are dealt with and then determines your health.

The game is more like a computer version of *Diplomacy* in miniature than a simulation but there is a great deal of strategy involved. It could prove to be frustrating however. More than once I thought my progress was good — only to be stopped in my tracks by the grim reaper himself. But maybe I was just unlucky.

The war game is rather simple in terms of complexity but adds satisfying depth to an already subtlely demanding game. One good feature is the ability to access a status screen to examine how good your performance is. My only real gripe lies in the inability to fight wars against the computer. Definitely the kind of game that gets better with more players.

I should add that this games seems to grow on you. I've rated it slightly higher than when I first saw the Commodore version simply because it seemed much more enjoyable this time around.

Finally, a word of warning. After considerable trouble getting it to load on anything other than a CPC464 and with no advice on the matter from Ariolasoft, a question mark hangs over compatability with other models. You have been told.

Presentation 68%
Graphics 50%
Complexity 40%
Authenticity 40%
Playability 69%
Value for money 72%
Overall 70%

WATERLOO

Lothlorien, £9.95 cass

Another long wait has paid off. After months of hoping, waiting, resorting to over-eating (okay, you get the point) . . . It's here. Lothlorien has ventured into the Amstrad market. So, without further ado . . .

This must be the most popular period enjoyed by the traditional wargamer (with the possible exception of Ancient) and so it was a pleasure to find a new Napoleonic game released — on the classic battle itself.

Lothlorien's series of wargames got off to something of a dodgy start but *The Bulge* was a classic on the Spectrum and my respect for them has been far higher since. *Waterloo* comes beautifully packaged in a large format cassette holder with excellent artwork and a slim but excellent manual — which many conventional wargames companies would do well to imitate.

The game deals with this famous battle on a strategic level, the player commanding divisions. Ordering each of the units is achieved via a menu occupying the lower portion of the screen whilst the cursor is positioned above the required unit. A corps may be commanded by giving direct orders to the command division and several units will then follow those orders. Alternatively, divisions may be given specific missions of their own to carry out. This has been excellently implemented leading to the potential for many varied strategies.

The map across which the various units may move is several times the size of the screen itself. The graphics are simple but effective and the screen 'window' moves accordingly when the cursor is nearing the edge. The choice of colours makes monochrome play just as satisfactory.

Logical factors such as the effects of terrain on troop and cavalry units is considered and such features also affect the outcome of combat. Lothlorien have thoughtfully included tables to help the player calculate advantages and disadvantages resulting from the pursuit of different options as they present themselves. Retreating units also have their fighting ability altered whilst any units that rout are immediately removed from the playing area.

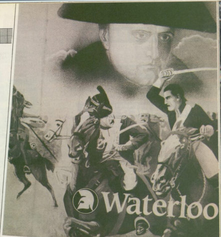
An interesting feature of the game is the the way the computer deals with orders. If a unit fails to achieve its objective due to resistance, when that resistance has been overcome, it will attempt to continue pursuing the last orders it was given. Another good idea is that the various commanders involved may suggest alternative strategies to your own throughout play. It is for you to decide whether or not to listen to these suggestions.

However, not all is perfection with this game. Firstly, the lack of a two-player option is a little disappointing. I can see Lothlorien's view that most computer wargamers play solitaire but it would have been another feather in their cap if they had put in the option anyway.

Another factor which caused some upset when the game was released on the Spectrum was the lack of artillery in the game. It had a great part to play in the battle and some people questioned the authenticity of any simulation which could have such an ommision. Lothlorien has given the French an extra corps to offset this imbalance and keep playability to a maximum and whilst it may sound sacrilegious to some, it works. Most of the games I've played have outcomes that mirror the historical events very well indeed. Bearing these considerations in mind, it must be for personal taste to decide on the wisdom of this move.

The company has really done little more than a straight conversion of its original game but given the nature of the beast, this is not a particularly bad thing. I would have liked to have seen the emergence of a more detailed scenario, more play options and so forth on a disk-based version but sadly this was not to be. However, future Lothlorien games for the Amstrad will have some features not found in this one and that must be something to look forward to.

For those people seeking a Napoleonic game of quality this game should give them more than enough to stay happy for some time. It has its faults but they do not detract significantly from the enjoyment. Given the price and the quality of packaging as well, the only fair conclusion is that Lothlorien has made a very good start which promises to get even better.



Presentation 90%
Graphics 92%
Complexity 70%
Authenticity 81%
Lastability 90%
Value for money 91%
Overall 92%

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AM TIX! COMPETITION

WIN AN ADVENTURING WEEKEND FOR TWO

Those nice people who live in the smokey wastes of Industrial England in sunny Dudley, namely **Gargoyle Games**, have been very pleasant to this particular comps minion in the past. Always dragging me out from behind piled mail sacks to play their latest game and hiding me from the wrath of Auntie Aggie when mail goes missing.

As the company scapegoat life is not all kidding around, however, and when I saw *Heavy on the Magick* it conjured up all sorts of strange mythical pictures that brought a little colour into the otherwise monochromatic existence of a humble comp minion.

Sparked with such imagination I thought that it might be nice, for once, to have a competition which sets your imagination at the full mercy of my brain which, although the size of a planet, has only the space of a closet in which to manoeuvre.

You must write a story in less than 300 which will fit into the masterpiece that I've been writing for the last six months. Unfortunately, time has been short and I've only written the beginning and the end but I do know what needs to be included to make my story a bestseller. So, you must include in your story the following items:

A magician; a Gargoyle; a bottle of strength elixir, an ogre; a troll; a hooded figure; the casting of blast and freeze spells, and spells which invoke demons.

All you then have to do is to fit all the items into a coherent story which will fit between the following bits of prose . . .

The light was failing as I took my first tentative step into the unwelcoming mouth of the accursed cave. I lit a torch and with its spitting luminescence held in front of me, I drew myself forward . . .

. . . Suddenly, in a blinding flash of light the wizard disappeared whilst his last words echoed around the cave: 'You will always remember me as I will remember you, but never forget always follow the path that keeps life ***Heavy on the Magick****.'*

30 RUNNERS UP PRIZES OF DISK OR TAPE VERSIONS OF HEAVY ON THE MAGICK

Such hard work will not go unrewarded and Uncle Greg from Gargoyle is offering an all-expenses paid adventure weekend for two just outside old Londinium in a labyrinth of caves where you are trained in the ways of adventuring in one of several different classes, including Warrior, Mage, Priest or Pathfinder. If London is too far for your adventurous feet to travel then Gargoyle will try to locate you at a similar venue closer to Chateau vous.

If you don't win or you're too much of a scaredy cat to collect the first prize then there are 30 runners-up prizes of tape or disk copies of **Heavy on the Magick** to add to your treasure trove of adventure software.



So, get your thinking caps on and send your completed story post haste, to **MASTERPIECE COMPETITION, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB** to arrive no later than Tuesday June 24.

AMTIX! TOP TWENTY FOR JUNE

Here it is! The latest Top 20 Chart as voted by you, the readers of AMTIX! This month you voted for just under 100 games. The figures in brackets are last month's position and it is interesting to note that this month both of Virgin's Sorcery games are in the chart.



1 *(1)* **YIE AR KUNG FU** Imagine
18,970,480 Stephen Everitt, Thorney, Peterborough

2 *(3)* **WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST** Melbourne House
231,000 D Ramdene, East Tilbury, Essex

3 *(4)* **SORCERY PLUS** Virgin Games
139,644 Vivian Jim, Newport, Gwent

4 *(2)* **ELITE** Firebird
3,000 credits Benedict Green, Wimbledon, London

5 *(5)* **BRUCE LEE** US Gold
472,250 Stephen Cushnahan, South Gosford, Newcastle Apon Tyne

6 *(15)* **HIGHWAY ENCOUNTER** Vortex
148,370 Christina Smith, Goodwick, Dyfed

7 *(6)* **WHO DARES WINS 2** Alligata
239,350 Robin Pullen, Thetford, Norfolk

8 *(10)* **CAULDRON** Palace
124,550 Gary Taylor, Royston, Hertfordshire

9 *(—)* **SPY v SPY** Be

10 *(—)* **RAMBO** Ocean
159,500 Warren Hunter, Westcliffe on Sea, Essex

11 *(—)* **STRANGELOO**
10,599 Gordon Corera, Totteridge, North London

12 *(—)* **SORCERY** Virgin Games
96,654 Rodney Lloyd, Brookside, Telford

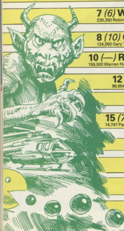
13 *(—)* **WI**

14 *(16)* **BARRY McGUIGAN'S BOXING** A

15 *(7)* **3D GRAND PRIX** Amsoft
14,747 Paul Stead, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire

16 *(9)* **DALE**
126,086 Martin Gill, Billingh

17 *(12)* **SPELLBOUND** Mastertronic



18 *(—)* **ALIEN 8** Ultimate
completed Scott McCallum, Kilbride, Glasgow

19 *(—)* **KNIGHT LORE** Ultimate
completed A Jones, Market Drayton, Shropshire

20 *(—)* **SOUL OF A ROBOT** Mastertroni
completed Qasir Fiaz, Burnley, Lancashire



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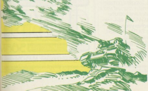
P Virgin Games

IN TER SPORTS Electric Dreams

Ac tivision

Y THOMPSON'S SUPERTEST Ocean

ghan n, Lincoln



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HOW TO VOTE AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

Thanks once again to all those who voted for the fourth AMTIX! Readers' Chart. In order for the chart to be as representative as possible, it is vital that as many people as possible vote every month, so please keep those entry forms coming in!

Congratulations must once again go to **Imagine** as their game, *Yie Ar Kung Fu*, is still at the top of the chart, and also to **Virgin Games** as their name appears three times.

The latest batch of high scores have been entered but most people are still not filling in that part of the form so there are gaps. Come on, play the game, fill in all the details so we can give you a comprehensive service. Anyway, congratulations to those of you who have their scores published and please keep them coming in!

This month's three winners (if you can call being pulled from a hat winning) are Scott McCallum of East Kilbride, Glasgow; Paul Stead of Huddersfield, West Yorkshire; and Chris Chapman of Teddington, Middlesex. Each will be receiving the game of their choice from Aunty Aggie in due course.

Voting is simple enough. Just fill in the form (ALL OF IT) and list your favourite five games in descending order with the best one at number one. If you do not want to cut up the magazine you can copy the form on a postcard (preferably) or the back of a sealed envelope, but once again don't forget to write in all the details that are needed.

AMTIX! READERS TOP TWENTY CHART VOTING FORM

Please write in CAPS in an eyestrain free manner.

Name ....

Address ....

....

....

Postcode ....

The World's five hippest games in order of preference are:

TITLE

1 ....

2 ....

3 ....

4 ....

5 ....

From one of the five games above select one and give us your high score:

TITLE ....

ACHIEVEMENT ....

My machine is the 464/664/6128/8256 (delete as applicable).If I am a winner the game I would like is:

....

Send your coupon to:

AMTIX! TOP TWENTY, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE, SY8 1DB

SAY "KWAH"

AND PICK UP ONE OF 50 GAMES UP FOR GRABS IN THE AMAZING REDHAWK COMP



On a bright and sunny day in Ludlow, being trapped within the gloomiest recesses of AMTIX! Towers, forces a young competition minion's thoughts to turn to fantasy.

I sometimes wish I could say a word that would result in a terrific flash, temporarily blinding the immmense edams (or big cheeses to you), send Aunt Aggie scuttling back to her garret and blow the internal workings of the pre-nursery reviewer's Brixton Briefcase.

Life would be so much easier as a superhero. I could take off and save the world from little town posties with bulging mailsacks tied to the back of their clanking 1959 Raleigh Speedstars. I'd be just like **REDHAWK** the superpowered character in the great new cartoon adventure from Melbourne House.

He wakes up as Kevin Oliver in a hospital with no memory other than the word 'KWAH'. Kevin's no costumed crusader — in fact, he's a bit of a wimp until he says 'KWAH' at which point he becomes **REDHAWK**, protector of the weak and defender of the spirt — a bit like our own dear Malc who protects any lone drink down at *The Pig and Ball Bearings* with a crazed tenacity.

When Malcolm says 'KWAH' the transformation is amazing and he can even make it out of his bathchair for short periods, such is the power of the incantation.

Aunt Jo at Melbourne is so convinced of the benefits of saying 'KWAH' that she's going to offer 50 copies of **REDHAWK** on cassette to the most lifelike drawings of Kevin Oliver, the wimpy secret identitiy of Redhawk. All you have to do is to put to a piece of paper, no bigger that the size of this page, an arty appraisal of what Redhawk looks like when he's no longer mashing muggers and has put on his off duty togs. The best 50 drawn from the warmth and security of Malcolm's bathchair will receive a copy of the game.

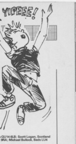
Send your wimpy sketches to **SAY KWAH, AMTIX! PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB** to arrive by June 24.

If you want to show other people that you know the secret of **KWAH** then there's also 5000 of the slightly limited edition designer **SAY 'KWAH'** badges to be given away free! We've all got them to stomp around Ludlow with and terrify the local gangsters and if you'd like to join this recnt trend in fashion just send a stamped addressed envelope to: **SAY KWAH BADGE OFFER, 60 High Street, Hampton Wick, Kingston, Surrey KT1 4DB** but hurry 'cos only the first 5000 will get them and you don't want to be the only one with no KWAH!!

5000 SAY 'KWAH' FREEBIE BADGES FOR THE FIRST 5000 READERS TO WRITE IN

SAY "KWAH"

WINNERS : WINNERS : WINNERS :



When I see some of the lovely prizes that Uncle Malcolm arranges with the software companies it really makes me angry! After all I do all the hard graft, make his tea, clean his shoes, grease his turbo charged wheelchair and arrange his regular supply of Grecian 2000 and how does he repay me you might ask? Well go on ask it! That's better. Well our ed is a very kind person. If I do all these chores and keep my broom cupboard clean now and again he allows me to walk down the stairs to play some of the new games. Perhaps he is human after all!!!

Anyway back to the grindstone. It has been yet another exhausting month sorting through millions of envelopes before picking the latest batch of LUCKY winners. It appears that more and more of you are trying your luck for the mailbags are coming in at an ever increasing rate. It's a shame but I am too busy now to annoy the girls in mail order. I wonder if I can arrange to recruit a junior apprentice competition minion? Anyway here's the moment you have all been waiting for, the chance to wade through the winners' list from the competitions in issue five.

THE FAMOUS LACCY BAND COMPETITION

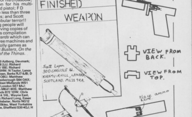
If you remember, the idea of this competition was to design the ultimate elastic band weapon, so that we could wipe out those Mancunian madmen from **Design Design**.

There were few rules and indeed the only stipulation was that the weapon had to be powered by an elastic band and be capable of firing chewed-up pieces of paper. Little did we imagine just how cunning some of you are. After sifting through a pile of plans and actually testing some of the weapons sent in it soon became evident some of you should be working for the Ministry of Defence. The weapons were lethal!

We felt it was only fair to mention the following in despatches for sending in really wicked devices: Karsten Jensen from Denmark for his crossbow; Richard Ormson for his multi-firing laccy band pistol; F D Newman for no less than three deadly weapons; and Scott Logan for his tubular terror!!

The following people will shortly be receiving copies of **Design Design**'s compilation *Working Backwards* which can be run on all three machines and contains such jolly games as *Dark Star*, *Tank Busters*, *On the Run* and *Halls of the Things*.

Karsten Jensen, 9000 Azlborg, Denmark; John Ward, Leics LE8 2JJ; Richard Harrison, Cardiff CF4 1BE; Richard Ormson, Lancs BL8 2HW; N Taylor, Lancs L39 2DZ; Andrew Green, Berks RJ7 6JB; D A Bullock, Beds LU4 OBU; Matthew Blakesley-Spicer, Mexborough S64 OAX; Stuart McCartney, West Midlands WS1 3LJ; Ian Whitehead, London SE7 8AJ; Mark Bichener, Beds MK41 8HS; Matthew Burton, West Midlands B72 1DW; Chris Beltrami, London SE4 1HL; Wayne East, Herts SG2 9JF; Mark Richard Long, Essex CM8 1ER; Andrew Webster, Notts NG12 5EG; Amtix Reader, Ilkley, West Yorkshire LS29 6NJ; G J Thurtle, Sheffield S30 4QJ; H Breach, Hants SO23 9QR; Daniel Singerman, Southampton SO2 1SF; Heath Steward, Worcs B61 9HN; Daryl Ward, Leics LE8 2JJ; Haran Siva, Surrey KT3 5DD; Mr D Clewley, Herts WD6 2ED; Richard Budd, Hampshire GU34 1QT; Christian Watts, Tyne and Wear NE39 1EQ; Mike L Hunt, West Midlands DY2 OAE; Mark White, Cork, Eire; Chris Clark, Gwynedd, North Wales; S Short, Suffolk CB9 OON; Ayan Osman, London E2 6BN; Fuad Mohamed, London E2 6BN; Tracey Dallatty, London E1; Mr R Sarno, Tameside SK14 4TF; Nicholas Palmer, Berks RG13 1TA; Mr F D Newman, Hants PO13 OJG; John Sholicar, Glos GL52 3DA; Michael Godfrey, Middlesex TW1 4RJ; Colin Broad, Manchester Ol1 2NY; Mr Eric Wilson, Cambridgeshire CB6 2TG; J Cumming, Notts NG10 3PU; Matthew Huntington, Cumbria LA23 2HF; Chris Secker, Nunthorpe TS7 ONX; Stephen Barnes, Carrickfergus BT38 7JR; Ben Fletcher, Middlesex TW11 9LY; Christian Karanagh, Hants GU14 6LB; Scott Logan, Scotland ML11 9RA; Michael Bullock, Beds LU4 OBU.





THE ACM REVENGE COMPETITION

One thing is certain. You really do have vivid imaginations. When I asked you to think of ways in which I could get my own back on our now departed former editor you came up with loads of ideas. In fact some of them were so good I'm sure he got wind of them and decided to move south but quickly.

As you will recall Big J decided my fridge looked cold and decided to put it in my bed to keep it warm. In doing so, of course, he just happened to tear my sheets into shreds. Well imaginations did run riot and the following people will be receiving an Obsidian sweatshirt, courtesy of Artic, just as soon as they advise our glorious leader, El Malco, of the size of their chest! Some ideas were so TERRIBLE it was decided to hide them away until a future date.

The ones which were printable included such jolly ideas as: getting him drunk as a skunk, dressing him up in women's clothing and then dumping him somewhere very public; sticking itching powder in his bed; buying a scrap car which looks like his and then crushing it; forcing him to drive a Sinclair C5; putting sand in his vaseline(?); a fiendishly trapping his abode whereby he electrocutes and cremates himself; putting custard in his coat pockets; booking a drag artist dressed as a kissogram girl to get VERY friendly with him; and fitting an extra strong spring to the eject button of his 6128.

Anyway the lucky winners are as follows.

Richard Harrison, London SE23 2TJ; Ian Whitehead, London SE7 8AJ; Heath Steward, Worcs B61 9HN; Haran Siva, Surrey KT3 5DD; Colin Broad, Manchester OL1 2NY; David Hall, Manchester M32 9HA; Trunkie Harman, Kent TN1 2LE; Sandra Shevill, Surrey CR3 2ST; Chris Secker, North Yorkshire TS7 ONX.

FOUR FORE
VOYA

The famous American adventure games writing outfit INFOCOM is generally shy and retiring, but in last month's phone interview marathon with Dave Lebling and Steve Meretzky, SEAN MASTERSON learned something about how Infocom go about designing their games. In this concluding part, the receiver is handed over to two more vital cogs in the Infocom machinery.

PART THREE: STU GALLEY (SENIOR GAME DESIGNER)

When Stu Galley came on the line, I asked him how the company actually worked. One of the things that has been said about Infocom is that there are no real bosses. 'Yeah, I think that's fair to say. Anyway, in my group, as game designers, we're very co-operative. I think there's very little difference in status.

'Typically, the whole process of game design takes nine to twelve months. Say from conception to end. The conception will start with an idea — either one that the designer has himself or from talking with a collaborator or whatever. But in many ways I think it's like writing a long work of fiction, anything that takes that long. Starting with the process of outlining, typically the designer will write a synopsis of a few pages, sort of an outline and it tells the important ideas and features that this game will have. And that's passed round for comment and we get together once there's the go ahead. Then we spend two or three months making the first draft of the program so to speak.

'Our group meets once a week at least, for lunch and talking over the status of different games that are being developed and whatever other issues have to be discussed. You know, usually, at least one or two things — er design issues are brought up that need to be discussed. Even at the early stage, the conceptual stage, a meeting like that can be really useful for er . . . I was just trying to finish my sentence and I forgot the word . . . brainstorming!'

Stu had a first for the company with *Seastalker*. Given the company's reputation for producing complex, high level adventures, were there any complications writing a junior game?

'No, I think it's something of a higher standard to write a simpler game because I wanted the program to respond intelligently to the kinds of inputs that the younger players are apt to use. We did a bit of testing with some actual live kids here in the office and er . . . one of the things that I discovered about younger players is that they use a big variety of different sentence structures, sort of more colloquial or more ungrammatical inputs. And I wanted to be able to do something helpful with a situation like that while at the same time, sort of . . . I didn't want to accept really ungrammatical commands because I wanted to set a good example to the player.

'On the other hand, I found that kids could and would use commands that adults would never think of. So in a way, I think that the standard of friendliness and fun was maintained as far as I can see.

'I think that all kinds of people play it. I don't have any market research at my fingertips or sales research but I know that, I've seen reviews of the game in magazines written by adults and they often regard it as just as puzzling just as much fun.'

Stu sounded so enthusiastic — I assumed he got a great deal of pleasure from his work. 'Yes, yes I do. It's funny, it's almost like a dream fulfilled but up until a few years ago, I had no idea that this was what my dream was because I had no examples to go by.'

I was surprised to hear about his immediate reactions after a game had been finished. I had assumed there would be a celebratory mood but apparently, this was not the case. 'Well frankly the immediate feeling is a bit of a let down. I think, of course there's a feeling of relief that, you know it's like finishing a year at university, getting all of the exams out of the way. I'd say a let down because there's no immediate feedback — whether you did a good job or not. Once the programming is finished, then there's a couple of months at least, before there's feedback from players or reviewers. It really would be more like six months to a year before one gets the feeling of job well done or whatever.'

So what did he have planned for the future? Were there any exciting ideas for a new game? 'Yes there is actually. Let's see. I'm not too sure how much I should say about this as it might turn into a product. I've at least one — probably several. Personally I'd like to reach new segments of the audience by making each new game innovative or appealing in a different way from all the others so that someone who had maybe tried *Zork* or tried a mystery and not gotten excited about it might find something really interesting in a different sort of game.

'I think all categories of popular fiction would be fun to make into games. Personally I would like it to be just interactive fiction. Well, writing interactive fiction plus is a two edged sword, because while you have a lot more room to do things in you also have the problem of taking on a bigger project and having a lot more work to do to get all the details right. I sort of prefer a smaller scope, something more like a stage play instead of a movie. I think the confines are helpful in some ways.

'Well actually I did work on a game that I spent about six months on and then decided to shelve it, so to speak — to put it aside. The problem there, was that the story line wasn't sufficiently well developed to make it really interesting. I guess I had a vision of a certain kind of atmosphere in the writing that was rather hard to bring off and after some testing in house here, it became clear that that it would need some significant changes to make it work right. I'm glad we're able to do that and we don't have to forge ahead with something that doesn't really work well.'

Infocom appear as a very secretive organisation. I asked Stu whether this profile was intentional? 'Yes, I think it's generally true of American software companies particularly that they don't comment on new products until they're officially announced. And I think the reason for that is because of the last question we talked about where the product may be under development and although the company may intend to release it on time, unforseen things may happen and it has to be postponed or cancelled. So it just seems safer, I guess, to keep the wraps on a product until it's finished.'

When I asked Stu what his favourite game was he pointed out that one of them wasn't an Infocom game. No problem, said I, just tell us what they are. 'It's just that the other times I've been asked that question, usually Infocom games are excluded. Okay, it's very hard to say, really. It's like asking a parent to pick a favourite child. Each are favourites in different ways. I still enjoy *Witness* for certain aspects of it, although I now feel that I could have done it a lot better. That was my first one.

'*Seastalker* is similar. I like certain things about it very much.

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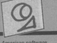
it's been a real good experience working here directly with the people because everyone is so creative so, it's a totally creative environment. I'm not at a lack for having any ideas what to do.



MINDS
VER
GING



It's almost like a dream fulfilled but up until a few years ago, I had no idea that this was what my dream was because I had no examples to go by.





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Part Two

I like the game I'm working on right now in many ways. There are a lot of different things about it. Er . . . I'm looking at my shelf full of packages here! I like *Hitch Hikers*. That's a lot of fun.

'As far as non-Infocom games, I think my favourite is *Loderunner*. The thing that I like about it is that it's the huge variety of the scenes derived from this very small set of building blocks and it reminds me in a way of mathematics — one of my favourite subjects, because it's like taking those small set of axioms and deriving elaborate mathematical structures from them. But *Loderunner*'s the way to do it visually.'

PART FOUR: CARL GENATOSSIO (ART)

Finally, I spoke with the man responsible for all those crazy bits and bobs that proliferate in an Infocom game box. He can introduce himself. 'I've been with the company since last April. And before that I was actually working for the ad agency that Infocom had at that time. I guess I would say that I've been working on Infocom packaging over two years. I'm 31.

'I came to the company last year to start a creative department for packaging and other related material that we produce and I had worked at the agency where we develop most of the crazy packaging for Infocom, so I knew everything there was to know about the product before I started here, kind of a nice transition to come from the agency to here. And you know, it's been a real good experience working here directly with the people because everyone is so creative so, it's a totally creative environment. I'm not at a lack for having any ideas what to do. Just from talking to the people around here, you know.'

One of the clever aspects of game packaging is the way Infocom hide protection within the package rather than the program. Carl commented on this. 'Well that's worked out better on some games than on others. Sometimes we'll get a real good idea for an anti-pircay device. I don't know if you have seen *AMFV*. The secret decoder wheel in that is really essential to play the game. It's something like 360 random number access combinations. It's not something you can xerox a copy of. It's not something you can pass on to a friend and forget about because, you really need that to play the game.'

It had occurred to me that the decoder wheel was similar to *Sorcerer*'s Infotator. 'No that was done by someone else at the ad agency. That was prior to my involvement on Infocom games. But you can see that we do put a lot of thought into devices that actually, the person who buys the game would want to have in the first place and it's essential to playing the game.

'We probably, out of any software or any entertainment software company, yeah we probably spend more on the package than anyone else does and er — we have very high quality printing; again a lot of thought is put behind everything that goes into the package in general. So with that in mind, we just put in the extra effort to make up a protection device that is attractive and works quite well and fits the mood of the game.'

'Usually, from concept to finally printed package, it takes about four months. We start out when the game is in alpha testing. We get a look at the game when the internal tester takes a look at it. Me and my copywriter in the marketing department get a look at the game at that point. We play it for about a week or so and then we have a creative meeting with the game writers and the marketing dept.



What killed those packages was the fact that the dealers couldn't stack a flying saucer on a shelf very well! They kept falling off and rolling in the aisles, you know?



'We come up with a creative focus for what the packaging should be as it relates to the game and at that point it takes about two to three weeks for a concept for the total package. And once that is settled, it takes about a month to get art and photography and typography done and from that point I'd say that once art has started and all of that and copy is written, it takes about another month to put all the boards together to get the material ready for printing. The printing process takes about eight weeks.'

One of the most startling visual aspects of older Infocom games were the box shapes. These have now been standardised. Carl made several points about the reasons for this. 'I can speak about the original packages a bit because I know somewhat about that. When Infocom first started out as a company, they had come to the ad agency which at that time was Giardini-Russell in Watertown Massachusetts. Anyway, they had come to the agency at the time and the agency was very big in the hi tech field and and they (Infocom) only had a very small budget. They said, 'How do we market and advertise these games?' And based on what the agency had seen of the games and the amount of money available, they said, 'Basically, you should put all of your money into packaging because that's going to be the thing that's most noticable about your product' and that's where we started with these wild packages.

'Now the first games like *Suspended* and *Starcross* and the *Zorks* (although the *Zorks* had a very simple package) but the others up to *Seastalker* were all in very intricately put together packages simply to be another . . . something that people would want to touch and hold and get into! But what killed those packages was the fact that the dealers couldn't stack a flying saucer on a shelf very well! They kept falling off and rolling in the aisles, you know?'



FOUR MINDS FOREVER VOYAGING



So did Carl find any constraints with new packing? 'No I don't as a matter of fact. You know we've standardised the boxes as you can see but each one of those packages is individual. I approach them as an individual problem and I find that there is very little repetition in what I do, even though the format is the same. I am basically free to do whatever I want to do. For instance, we're doing something right now in, we're working on the *Trinity* game, I don't know if you know about that one. Well we're doing something new in that the manual in that game is going to be a comic book. I don't know how familiar you are with comic books — are you familiar with the **Classics Illustrated**?'

No — unfortunately . . .

'Well, okay, that's a comic book series that was out in this country in the late fifties and early sixties and what they were like were sort of comic book versions of history books. So this game, *Trinity* which is a fantasy game, has a lot of reference to historical information, so we're doing a full colour comic book in a Classic style. I'm always working with different people. That's what I think keeps the packaging fresh and challenging, certainly for me to work on. I find each one to be just like starting a whole new thing.'

Was there a particularly memorable design that Carl had worked on? 'I would have to say, probably *Suspect* because of the art style for one. I went with a literary style — a high brow literary style and because of all the pieces that went inside that, the invitation, the receipt for the costume, the magazine article — and the article in particular, I wanted it to have a look about it so it would actually look as if it had been ripped from the pages of a magazine, so we had to make a special bad cut for that so that it was consistent with every one that we printed. That one happens to be my favourite and it was one of the first that had to be designed for the new format so I feel that it works really well because I put a lot of thought into it.'

I asked him how was it decided where the booklet would stop and the bits would start. 'There's a photograph on the back of every package which shows you what you get inside the box, and usually those things are not created until after the package has been printed. So what I have to do is make mock ups of those things and that's probably the most difficult part of the whole packaging thing, creating and photographing those items in an interesting scene to give you the mood for the game.

'We try to do something different every time we work on a game and I guess I don't know how to answer that except to say that whatever happens, we're always looking into other things. It's an ongoing thing from day to day. If I see something in a magazine or in a toy store or a book store . . . I have a tremendous collection of little items that might be interesting for something further on down the line, somewhere, sometime, somehow, you know?

'When I'm busy I never keep track of the time. When I first came here they had held the work for me. They were waiting for me to come in because I was coming over from the agency. When you're really rolling on something worthwhile then time doesn't matter. That's another reason why it made sense to come here and start this department, because the way an agency works, they bill by the hour. My time is virtually unlimited here and I get a chance to do everything that I want to do and sit down and nit pick without worrying how much time I'm spending on it.

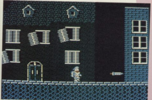


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'It's a sort of perfectionist's type of job. You can come here at two in the morning and there'll be someone here. There's someone working around the clock. When you get dedicated people like that and it's a fun job, I mean it doesn't make any difference how long you . . . well, how many hours you put in and we have a flexible atmosphere as long as you get your job done and have a good time with it.'

Time was ticking on and my throat was becoming dry. Thanking the folks at Infocom, I placed the the receiver down and made my way to the Bull Inn to rehabilitate. As the old flatulence bitter trickled down my throat, I knew that a ball of fluff would never be the same again.

Elite look to be doing a very respectable conversion of Capcoms's arcade game GHOSTS AND GOBLINS — soon you could be playing the game without having to feed 10 pees into a slot!



Passing through the dilapidated township which comes after the Ice Palace, the knight lobs a sword ahead of himself, just in case a nasty is lurking offscreen



The partially completed loading screen for Ghosts and Goblins — doesn't the little knight look determined . . .

TRIPPING THE KNIGHT FANTASTIC

Work is proceeding apace on **Elite**'s latest arcade-to-Amstrad conversion: **Ghosts and Goblins**. The original arcade game, from the **Capcom** stable, plonks you at the start of a massive scrolling landscape through which your chivalrous character has to pass in order to save a damsel in distress.

Your knight has a number of lives at his disposal, and starts his quest inside in a protective tin suit. The first contact with a nasty robs the hero of his armour and he has to soldier on in little more than a nappy. As you might expect, nappies are hardly ideal combat gear, and the second time the knight takes a hit, he loses a life.

The original arcade game boasts a massive playing area — so big in fact that not a lot of people managed to fight their way through all the levels to rescue the damsel. Obviously, the whole game simply won't fit into a home micro; wonderful though Straddles is, **Elite**'s Amstrad version will contain four of the best levels from the arcade game.

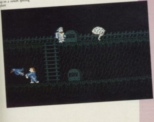
The game begins in a graveyard, populated by zombies who sproing out of the earth around your knight as he sets out on a long and perilous journey. Nasty spitting plants eject gobbets of venom which the knight must avoid to stay alive, and vicious birdies soar and swoop in the skies. Your man is equipped with throwing knives, which can be used to despatch adversaries and is capable of running, jumping, ducking and climbing. Some of the marauding zombies carry weapons, and when you kill them your knight automatically exchanges his current weapon for the one carried by the dead z.

If chivalry and fighting skills prevail, the knight leaves the graveyard, hops on a dinky little raft and crosses to the second half of the level where he is pestered mercilessly by manic witches who swoop and soar around his ears with one aim in mind: eradicate the goody. If the hags don't get their way, the knight comes to the end of the first section where he's met by a large and thoroughly evil goblin yob who guards the doorway which gives access to the next stage in the game — he's a real rambo of the supernatural world and needs to be hit several times before he expires, yielding the key.

Passing through the portal, the knight gains a new suit of armour if he's in nappy mode and makes his way through the ice palace — a network of platforms and lifts populated by kamikaze kritturs who home in on the hero, and this time the action scrolls in four directions. Tum te tum, survive the palace, despatch another giant bouncer on the exit and it's on to the street scene. Harmless shutters on the windows of buildings open to release flying gorgon types and a bit of scampering on ledges has to be done before the section can be completed and the final stage of the game entered. Fight your way through a network of caverns, and you get to rescue the gal.

When we visited the program factory at **Elite**, the team responsible for the Amstrad implementation had designed the backgrounds which scroll past during play and the animation was undergoing some refinement. The game was still in a fairly early stage; the loading screen was still only half complete and a lot of fine tuning and animation work lay ahead. **Elite** should be on target for a June launch, however, and there's a treat in store for all you would-be chivalrous Amsters out there . . . Not a bad start to an Amstrad programming career for **Nigel Alterton**, who's being aided on 'Fluffy bits' by **Dan Hartley**, while graphics and sound are the responsibility of **Ste Pickford** and **David Whittacker** respectively.

An action packed screen from an early version of Ghosts and Goblins. A Zombie chases a birdie while the knight sneaks up on a venom spitting plant

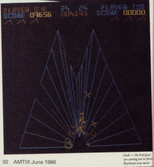


Clearing the Wireways of alien squatters is a fast and frantic occupation

A TEMPESTUOUS TIME

A spirally set of Wireways, full of aliens out to get you. Your zapper is on the bottom right of the screen and a burst of blue bullets meanders into the vanishing point





Gosh — the bad guys are coming out in force. Rachman was never this nasty to his tenants. Mind you, these guys don't pay rent . . .

Tempest, that most famous of ancient arcade games, is now being converted to the Amstrad under licence by **Activision**. For those of you who are too young to remember **Tempest**'s original incarnation, all of five years ago, here's a brief resume of the scenario . . .

As a very responsible and heroic type person, a very responsible job has fallen upon you. The Wireways need to be cleared of the alien marauders that currently infest them. The Wireways are an essential part of the future universe's travel system, as they hang in space acting as guide ways for for hyperspatial travellers. Without them anyone hyperwarping from A to B is likely to appear at point C or D, which according to the laws governing such things, is usually in the centre of a star — not very good for your health. Now you can see why the Wireways need to be cleaned. Off you go:

The aliens aren't overly keen on the idea of being zapped out of existence and are prone to fighting back. Thus the job is a dangerous one. Your employers have been kind enough to supply a remote controlled gun doobrie, so you don't actually have to get out there amongst the aliens and fight in person.

The main view has you looking down the receding Wireway with the zapper sitting at the end closest to you. The zapper is a simple mechanism which can be moved left, right, and fired. Aliens wend their way from the *far* end of the Wireway towards the zapper in the hope of mangling it and ending the attack on their new residences. They also send the odd fireball your way. If things get very mega hectic and a bit messy with aliens littering the wires, all of them about to trounce on your zapper, then the Super Zapper is available. Every time a Wireway is cleared one of these handy one-use-only devices is added to the inventory. Press the appropriate key and a very powerful pulse of electricity snakes its way down the grid wiping any baddies it pulses past. It's then up to you to carry on fighting the good fight.

As you shoot, blast and maim aliens, the points clock up until eventually all the offworld nasties squatting on the Wireway have been liquidated, whereupon the warp activates and the next Wireway whizzes into view. And the Wireways *keep* whizzing into view, ad infinitum, until all your zappers have been eliminated by the aliens.

The version of the game shown to the motley AMTIX! crew was very nearly finished, awaiting only the odd improving touch from programmer **David Paidmore**. Lucky old Amsters — Activision don't intend to produce versions for other micros. You should be able to amaze your chums with a copy of *Tempest* around June time if all goes well. The price hadn't been finalised when we saw the game — but a full review (together with the price) should appear in the next issue of AMTIX!

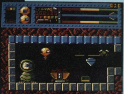
Gary Liddon

TIDYING UP THE NUKES

Inside an asteroid with radioactive waste — not a nice place to be. Good job you're in control of a droid and not actually there in person . . .



Your decontamination droid is the little orangey yellow round dude in the top half of the playing area. Who's eye is that watching the action?



A burst of anti-nasty energy issues forth from the droid, as you try to blow away a few nasties during EQUINOX



Original games, written specifically for the Amstrad, seem to be popping up all over the place. In keeping with this trend, **Mikro-Gen** are soon to release **Equinox**. Written by freelance programmer **Raphael Cecho** *Equinox* puts the player in the role of a lowly droid given the task of saving asteroid, Sury-Ani 7, from destruction. Man, in his ever expected carelessness, has managed to leave a whole bundle of of extremely dangerous radioactive waste canisters around the place. The radioactive material is unstable and ready to explode, contaminating the inside of the asteroid. It's a bit like a space-based Sellafield really. The canisters have been there for years, neglected and forgotten. Now they are all set to explode. A preliminary expedition has equipped the hollowed world with the needed disposal facilities, and it's up to you to dump the host of canisters into the disposal units.

The asteroid is an ancient place, hollowed out long ago during mining operations which turned its interior into a mining complex — a vast network of caverns and passageways. There are eight levels in the game, each containing sixteen screens, giving a total of 128 beautifully detailed locations to gawp at and explore. Getting around the place is fairly easy using retro rockets that propel the little spherical droidlet you control.

Thrust propels the little chap into the air while lack of thrust allows gravity to drag him downwards. Fire shoots a **Defender** type blast in the direction he faces, and the pulsing stream of laser fire totally destroys any security droids it may pass through. Security droids constantly materialise to molest you since the humans who left Sury-Ani 7 after it became too hot to live on, forgot to turn off the security systems. The attacking robot guardians sap away your energy and flying about is quite tiring, too. Blasting bullets via the droid's gun uses up ammunition. Luckily both power and pellets can be topped up at choice locations on the asteroid.

The short range teleports are important when playing **Equinox** but computer security passes have to be found before they teleports can be activated. Once a level has been cleared of all offending radioactive material you have to get to the next level — and the floor to floor warping facility is the only way to travel. First, you need the appropriate numbered access pass . . .

To get on in in the game, problems have to be solved in an adventurish type way. Certain objects need to be used to gain access to other objects and so on. It's all very logical and fun to do. The version of **Equinox** brought to AMTIX! Towers had most of the game finished, both graphics and gameplay, and was awaiting the final touches. A mid—May launch is scheduled, so more details should follow soon.

Gary Liddon

ON THE TRAIL OF THE ARMOUR OF ZOB



Oh dear! It must have been something you said. A serpenty monster is about to have a go at you. The map screen on the right of the display has changed to the Melee screen, where the status of your character and the monster is displayed

Down in the dungeons, doing battle with monsters and magic users

Role playing on the Amstrad has, until recently, been rather difficult, if not impossible. Now **PSS** are set to release their Spectrum hit *Swords & Sorcery* into the void and they're hoping it will be just as successful in its new incarnation. The game is set in a specially devised world created with **PSS**'s *Midas* system, and allows the player to become a fortune seeker, pitting wits and strengths (whether magical, physical or both) against monsters and traps in a maze-like underground labyrinth. By wandering through the dungeons, many quests and mini-adventures may be entered into, but the main aim is to recover the treasure — a suit of armour made by a master armourer, Zob. The component parts of this wondrous suit have been scattered across the dungeons and fabulous riches await the person who gathers them up and removes them from their resting place. Beware. Many have gone before you, and all have perished in the attempt.

Before embarking on the quest, your character may be trained by one or several masters from a choice of twelve, for fourteen days. Thus, a mixture of skills may be obtained and they can include thievery, fighting, magic or more subtle disciplines. Armour is also purchased — vital when entering into combat with the denizens of the dungeon.

To the left of the screen is a window which constantly displays your character's view. It is animated in a 3D perspective and gives the impression of actually walking down the corridors and into rooms. To the right of that window, a map of the current dungeon level is shown with a small blob to represent your character's position in it. It also displays the position of nearby monsters. This too, is constantly updated. Below these two windows is a message window used to enter text where required and to monitor conversations with any monsters or other warriors that may be encountered. Finally, at the bottom of the screen is a scrolling menu. There are actually several menus organised in a heirarchical structure. Selecting the Talk option, for instance accesses a sub menu of conversational gambits, if 'Greet' is then selected, another menu offering a choice of greetings is displayed from which the actual words to be said are taken.

Many monsters inhabit the dungeons. Some of them are friendly, some are not. Some can use magic and others can return the force of whatever you throw at them. Some may help if intelligent conversation is entered into (nothing too advanced, just don't insult them). Food and potions are to be found along with both enchanted and cursed items.

The game allows your character be saved out for use in subsequent sessions at the keyboard, and **PSS** intends to expand the basic game into a series with more dungeons and other adventures into which players can take their characters saved from the *Swords & Sorcery* module of the system. A character's experience increases with successful play as he is rewarded with treasure and power. From having only a few magic spells available at first, a whole arsenal of magical weaponry can be collected by the time the adventure is nearing completion (and you'll need all the magic using ability you can lay hands on).

The **PSS** team are keen to stress that their game offers both excitement from a visual point of view as well as characterisation and depth. *Swords & Sorcery* is the culmination of months of work, and the standards set within **PSS** for the game led to an extra year's work on the Spectrum version! Most of the options available in the game are menu based, and there is a reasonable number of courses of action available at any one time though the ability to have text input occasionally opens up more communications options.

No effort has been spared on the graphical aspects of the game and both the animation on the creatures and the flashes of colour as magical bolts of energy are fired are quite impressive. A redefined character set adds atmosphere to gameplay, while the background graphics compromise between detail and colour. All the emphasis is on creating a realistic environment for the player in a strong attempt to finally bring role playing to the home computer. A full report will decide how **PSS** fared in their noble aim once we've had a look at the final version of the game.

Sean Masterson

A sticky situation develops for Baz in ALLIGATA's next release . . .

MELTDOWN

Well it's far into the future and world still hasn't grown up. The Communists and Capitalists are still a fair way from being the old chums they should be and large amounts of money are being pumped daily into the Americans' now legendary Star Wars project. To hang a Sword of Damocles over the heads of their Red pals, good old Uncle Sam has set up a 'research centre' on the Moon's nearside armed to the hilt with all manner of nasty items that, by a very strange coincidence, just happen to be pointing at Mother Russia. The whole plant is based on a technology that man still doesn't fully comprehend and it comes as no surprise at all when one day the controlling main computer is the victim of a rather nasty psychosis and decides to let the plant's nuclear reactor drift towards **Meltdown**.

A hero is needed and, as in all good stories, one is found, a man called **Basil Bond**. Basil is a hip dude pegged out in a nifty pair of 501s, grey booties and a snazzy green jumper. Basil is a street cred hero! The task before Mr Bond is not an easy one in the slightest — he has to get to the computer main control room, eleectronically hack the blighter to bits and order it to reinsert the cooling rods into a rapidly heating core. What is more than likely to get Baz down is the huge number of cybermen-like robots that have been put into **Rampage Mode** after the computer's mind spaced out. 'Rampage Mode' means hacking it around the complex shooting at anything or anyone in sight. A pair of 501's aren't really top hole protection against banzai—ing battle droids so his chief has let him have the latest in personal body shields and I don't mean anti—perspirant. Even this little glory of tecnoporn is unable to withstand continual pounding so a meter at the lower left of the screen shows the shape the shield is in. Throughout this part of the game everything is shown from a security camera mounted on the walls' eye view, ie in classic *Alien 8* type style but with far more colourful and imaginative graphics.

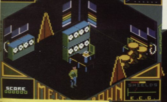
The complex is split between three levels, each containing sixty four offices, and somewhere in there lurk the computer terminals. Since America has declined financially in the last decade or so the terminals are good old fashioned BBCs as that's all they could afford. Though there are many different terminals on each floor, a few contain tests of skill in the form of sub-games. Some are a bit familiar and include such classics as **Mastermind** and **Space Invaders**. If Baz betters his electronic opponent then a password is added to his inventory. Acquire six of these info sachets and Baz gains access to the lift terminal which transports him to the next floor. Get past the third floor and you're into Martin Mainframe's data banks.

Due to be realised around balmy summer time *Meltdown* is one of the first few products to take advantage of the 6128's extra memory. But 464/664 owners shouldn't fret since, with a dash of technical magic, it will also work on your machines. The three floors are loaded separately and to act as an interlude between floors one and two as well as adding some VFM (value for money) Alligata has added a twee little platform game. Called **The Presidents Brain Is Missing**, this proggy is a *Blagger*-type game and turns out to be quite tricky.

So there it is, mere sprite man pitted against all the might of the American military and only you to help him. How can you resist? *Meltdown* should be reviewed fully in next month's AMTIX!

Gary Liddon

There's one final section to MELTDOWN and that's the end bit. Once access into Martin Mainframe has been achieved a simulation of a totally new type of programming language is swished into view. It's up to the Basil to suss out the new language and write a program to persuade the computer to reinsert some cooling rods. Baz has fallen foul of reviewer's bane though and has absolutely no accompanying documentation at all and has to work out the commands and their syntax all for himself. Yuckypoo!



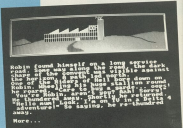
What a butch, chunky sprite our Baz makes, as he ponders a complex mathematical problem that might save us all from MELTDOWN.



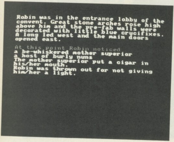
Alligata's newest hero, Basil, finds himself confronted by an unpleasant cyberman who is definitely in RAMPAGE MODE.

PREVIEW

DOWN IN THE FOREST WITH ROBIN OF SHERLOCK



Robin Hood is alive and well in Sherwood Forest. CRL are about to release an adventure program with a droll dialogue and a burlesque of traditional plots.





Parodies of games in adventures can work very well. Silversoft enjoyed a cult following with *Bored of the Rings*; its popularity was very much rooted in a market already established by Melbourne House, and it employed a similar technique as Havard Lampoon used with the Tolkien classic. **Robin of Sherlock** attempts to make a small clearing of its own in the adventure software forest by using a similar modus operandi. However *Robin of Sherlock* doesn't parody any singular classic as did *Bored of the Rings* prefering to present a burlesque of traditional plots.

The game is in three parts with each section being saved out before moving onto the next section of the mystery. *Robin of Sherlock* uses the familiar keyboard input routine with verb/noun commands and no facility for more complex ineraction. The graphics which accompany some of the location descriptions do not appear to detract from an adventure that relies mainly upon its droll dialogue as a selling point. Suffice to say that upon finding the discarded clothes of the coy Lady Marion who is having a swim, it could be surprising to patrons of the Robin Hood legends that EXAMining the good lady's garb reveals them to consist of a rough dress, fish-net stockings, a suspender belt and a pair of green silk micro-panties! No wonder Robin never the left the leafy confines of Sherwood. The game is imaginative in dialogue and the warped humour of Furgus McNeil, the author, is well displayed throughout and has raised a titter or two within the office. We will be reviewing *Robin of Sherlock* in its entirety when the finshed version arrives with us.

Garth

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD



Ocean, £9.95 cass



CRITICISM

1 A lot of people were impressed by the Spectrum version of this game a while ago but I do not think the Amstrad version is all that good. It's fun for a while but soon becomes a bit boring. There is lots to do on your first time around but I imagine it's not the type of game people will want to keep playing in years to come. It is neatly programmed but it could have been improved to make it as good as the group's album. Well, maybe not that good but better than it is. It's not really that good and I have to say I'm disappointed with the Amstrad version.

2 At last *Frankie* on the Amstrad, and what a good game Denton Designs have made of it. The music is excellent and good use has been made of the Amstrad three channels. The graphics are excellent and contain lots of detail and colour, but the game takes such a long time to play. *FGTH* is definitely not one of those games that is put on just before you go out in the morning, but a game that needs a lot of attention and time to get totally involved in it. It can be played without reading the instructions very easily but to put the game to full effect you have to launch yourself into the booklet and involve yourself completely in the world of Frankie. This should only be bought if you've got lots of time and good stamina to play. I was hooked for hours and I didn't even get to the Pleasure Dome! The murder that takes place is a very mysterious affair and a note pad is essential. The game ticks away at a very quick pace. Frankie is definitely a new experience in games playing on the Amstrad.

3 Looking at the package you would have expected the game to be really good but it isn't! The sound, although clear, is annoying due to the inclusion of a tune which tends to get on one's nerves. The graphics are good and colourful except for your man who is all white (perhaps it's Holly!) It is far from a small game but it had little interest to me and I think many people might regret buying it. I do not rate it at all.

Supergroup, Frankie goes to Hollywood have been rather quiet over the recent months (or is it years?). Never mind though, here's something from Ocean to keep their fans occupied until they decide to 'cut some vinyl'. The official licenced computer game *Frankie goes to Hollywood* has nothing to do with the group personalities but is more of a weird, surrealistic 'experience'.

You play the part of average Joe Public, a citizen of Mundaneland. Poor old Joe is a boring old soul and completely devoid of personality. Now, to make him less boring and win him some personality you must help him on an adventure, guide him through Mundaneland and assist him to complete over sixty tasks which Frankie have sent. There are four factors to his personality; love, sex, war and religion, which all have to be built up by completing the numerous tasks. Each factor is shown on-screen as a bar, which increases as you complete his duties. When a bar reaches the top of the screen a letter appears, eventually spelling out BANG when Joe's personality is complete.

Along with personality points, pleasure points must also be built up. They are awarded when certain objectives are completed. When your score finally reaches 99,000 AND you have spelt out BANG you can enter the Heart of the Pleasure Dome and claim your reward.

The game starts with Joe in a typical suburbian street. He can walk around these streets or enter the various houses, explore the rooms and rifle through the cupboards and drawers found there. Sometimes points are awarded just for touching, say, a light switch, so leave no stone unturned. If you explore a cupboard or drawer a window opens, showing a cursor and the items inside, and moving the cursor over an object you desire and pressing the fire button places it in your pocket. You can access this pocket at any time and doing so shows the objects you are carrying and a cursor. Move the cursor over an object to 'use' it — in some situations using certain items will help you complete a task or add more points to your score.

Throughout the game you'll be presented with objectives, these happen quite unexpectedly — sometimes when you just touch something. When an objective is accessed a window opens which you have to run into (if you don't it'll close after a short period of time). The window then fully opens showing what is within and you can take part in whatever's there, usually a game of some sort.

There are eight of these 'games': three types of puzzle screens, The Terminal Room, where you need certain objects to complete the it, Sea Of Holes where you have to get to the floor at the bottom of the screen and the ZTT Room where a puzzle has to be solved. The others are more arcade-like with Cybernetic Breakout, 'Breakout' but with only one brick, Raid Over Merseyside, where you have to shoot the planes before they bomb Liverpool, Talking Heads, a shoot em up against the computer, Shooting Gallery where you have to take pot shots at our 'illustrious' leaders and finally The War Room where you have to shoot symbols.

If you complete a game then you are awarded pleasure and personality points and another window opens to allow you to delve further into the game. This keeps going until you either fail on a game (whereupon you're put back into Mundanesville) or until you reach the Pleasure Dome. The inside of the Pleasure Dome is like a 3D maze and you have to move around and try to find a door. Each door leads to another game but if you're inside the Pleasure Dome when you have full personality and pleasure points a special door leads to the final screen and the 'Ultimate Experience — the heart of the Pleasure Dome'. When inside the Pleasure Dome beware of floating sparks, they can be shot but it's best to avoid them — if one hits you then you're dumped back on the streets.

Within the game there is a little sleuthing 'sub-game'. This comes in the form of a murder mystery. When a murder happens every new location visited thereafter gives you a clue to the identity of the killer. When you feel confident that you've identified the killer you can return to the scene of the crime where you're given a list of suspects and you can choose who you think is the killer. Getting it right means bonus points, getting it wrong loses you lots.

Presentation 90%
Beautifully packaged, glossy documentation and a new mix of *Relax*.

Graphics 83%
The backdrops are nice but the main sprite looks like a lego man.

Sound 77%
A reasonable version of two tribes plays constantly.

Playability 77%
It's a weird game, but it's easy to play.

Addictive qualities 79%
It's impossible to die so you can play and play and play . . .

Value for money 80%
Higher than average, but if you're a *Frankie* fan it's better value than their 'official' merchandise.

Overall 80%
It's missed the *Frankie* bandwagon, but still is an enjoyable game nevertheless.



COMMANDO



Elite, £7.95 cass, £14.95 disk

This is the licenced version of the classic Capcom arcade game which has captivated thousands and thousands of arcade gamers all over Britain.

The game involves you taking the role of a super crack commando with a mission to penetrate deep behind enemy lines and destroy two main fortresses. The mission takes place over a vertically scrolling landscape and you have to take on the entire enemy army single handed, armed with a few grenades and a sub machine gun. There are boxes of grenades lying around the battlefield which you can pick up to replenish your stocks, but otherwise you just have to use your skill, reflexes and sub machine gun to survive.

To reach each fortress, four areas have to be passed through each with its own mini fortress at the end. When you approach a fortress its doors open and loads of soldiers pour out, spewing bullets from their guns and lobbing grenades. All the enemy soldiers have to be killed before the fortress can be taken — not a trivial task. When the defenders are dead, your man runs through the fortress gates, a message of congratulations is printed up on screen and it's on to the next area.

Each area has its own features and hazards. Level one is comparitively easy, but the game gets progressively harder: by the time level four is reached the going is really tough, with lots of obstacles to thwart swift forward progress. Luckily the enemy footsoldiers are only armed with single shot rifles and grenades. Even so, sheer weight of numbers often becomes totally overpowering.

There are two specialist weapons used by enemy soldiers: bazookas and mortars. Mortar bombers don't pose too much of a threat, since they can only fire one pretty inaccurate shot at a time. Bazooka carriers, on the other hand, are very dangerous, firing round after round of lethal shells which explode in a large cloud of deadly flak.

Vehicles trundle about the landscape. They come in various shapes and sizes and include trucks, jeeps and motorbikes. They've all got to be avoided and can be destroyed with a hand grenade. Jeeps can cause problems, as they carry a gunner armed with a sub machine gun. Lorries, too, are deadly and carry many soldiers who pile out when their transport stops.

The landscape is very barren — well, what do you expect for a desert? Dotted around are trees, little hills (usually the enemy come belting down the slopes) and rivers. Area one is pretty deserted with only a few trees and hills, although there is a narrow bridge which you have go under, and enemy soldiers are waiting to pounce on you on the other side. After the bridge there are rocks which the enemy use for cover and after them, the first mini fortress.

In Area two, foxholes filled with soldiers block the path to glory, and the only way to kill the soldiers is to lob grenades on them. While you're trying to do that they're busily trying to machine gun you down. Buildings and bunkers start to make an appearance too. Yet more soldiers pour from the buildings, while a fusillade of bullets comes from the bunkers.

Areas three and four feature all the hazards found in the earlier sections, only in far greater numbers. On area four, the final run up to the first fortress, you are forced to cross an airport which has lookout towers complete with machine gun wielding soldiers at the top.

Points are awarded for disposing of enemy soldiers and vehicles, and a hefty bonus can be earned by killing the two guards who hold an ally prisoner. Once he's been liberated, he disappears, rather than helping you fight your battle, however.

Control keys: Definable

Presentation 89%
Comprehensive instructions, generally well sorted out.

Graphics 86%
Not exactly detailed, but the on-screen action is fast and furious.

Sound 86%
May be a little disappointing to some.

Playability 89%
Very playable, once you learn how to stay alive.

Addictive qualities 90%
Bound to keep arcade addicts coming back for more.

Value for money 87%
A good game at a reasonable price.

Overall 88%
A worthy conversion from the arcade original.

CRITICISM

1

This is definitely better than Who Dares Wins II; Elite seem to have come up with an ideal mixture. One problem is that when the screen contains lots of characters, all moving, the gameplay slows down considerably. I found the enemy's bullets came at me at different speeds which is a good thing but makes it a darn sight more hard to play. Commando is worth buying at what is now one of the cheaper prices in the Amstrad range. The sound and graphics of the game are excellent with lots of colour but nothing sickly. The tune is excellent. This game works for me and is a must for all shoot'em up Amsters.

2

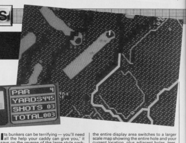
Having now enjoyed a good run in the software charts with *Commando*, Elite's conversion for the Amstrad should give them a new run on what is probably in software terms, an old game. The game is a little disappointing in terms of some comparisons that could be made between different versions, but nonetheless, it's still fast and furious and leaves you with shaking hands. The animation is vague and lacking in detail, but fast movement covers up the shortcomings. The sound is poor but after all, the game's really all about running around, getting excited and shooting the enemy — a task that *Commando* allows you to perform exceptionally well.

3

This is an excellent shoot em up game with slick graphics, plenty of colour and a great tune. It has been converted well. Commando is also well presented and the instructions are detailed. The main problem during play, as you might expect, is one of survival as you tend to die easily! Another niggle is that if you leave a box of grenades in a screen you can't return to it. Definitely one to get the adrenalin running!

NICK FALDO PLAYS THE OPEN

Argus Press Software, £9.95 cass





CRITICISM

1 An excellent golf simulation this. It has plenty of addictive qualities and combines good graphics, good colour and reasonable sound all of which make it worthwhile. The main problem is the control of the ball which I thought very poor. However, for the golf fan it is an interesting game, well worth the money. If you're not a fan, then maybe this is the way to start your interest in golf.

2 I've seen *Nick Faldo Plays the Open* in its Spectrum and Commodore incarnations. It seems a shame Amstrad owners have had to wait as long as this for their version, but perhaps the wait was worth it, for this is way and out the best of the three. Indeed, this is the best golfing simulation I've ever seen. The icons make play speedy and relatively simple. The size of the operating icons is fairly important because if they are too small, then the directional control is too coarse. I thought these might have been a touch larger, but the program seems fairly friendly in allowing for this. It takes some time to get used to the strength and direction, especially if the wind is blowing strongly and gusting from all directions. Obviously, golf is a specialist interest, so this isn't going to appeal to everyone, but the friendliness of the program takes the tedious 'simulation' sting out of it, and I suspect a lot of Amstrad owners will get plenty of enjoyment from it.

3 Though I am not a golf fan even in the very slightest (seems a bit odd doing this comment) NICK FALDO'S OPEN is great fun to play. What's nicest is how easy it is to use the icon system, unlike other games of this type it doesn't hinder at all. Graphically things could have been better but that doesn't detract from the game since the on-screen displays are adequate. It's all very challenging yet still easy to get into. To help every golf novice along, NFO even queries stupid moves allowing the player to retry. Despite my personal bias against golf I found NFO great fun to play. Golf addicts should go suitably bananas over this one.

Its bunkers can be terrifying — you'll need all the help your caddy can give you,' it says on the reverse of the large style packaging for this new Amstrad offering from the Mind Games Series. Nick Faldo, Open, bunkers — it must be golf and it is, but special golf, for this is the 1985 British Open Championship which was held at the Royal St George's Golf Course at Sandwich.

All the British Open championships are held on links courses, the original type of Scottish golf where the tussocks in the ground, the billowing sand dunes and the atrocious on-shore winds make for a game of endurance as much as skill. The mark of any good golf simulation is how much it encompasses the natural hazards of the game in as realistic a manner as possible. To add authenticity to *Nick Faldo's*, Argus have based the game closely on St George', and the packaging includes a history of the famous course as well as a hole-by-hole guide. This is not just decorative, knowing the ins and outs of a golf course is important to good play.

Once the game has loaded, a four option menu appears. From here you can select a full round (all 18 holes), Play out (holes 1 to 9), Play in (holes 10 to 18) or play any hole. Once a selection is made, the screen cuts to the main display which is divided into two horizontally. In the top two-thirds there is a bird's eye view of your immediate location is shown (on the tee of course, if you haven't already played a stroke). The lower half contains all the operating icons and a controllable cursor. The operating section is divided into three sectors. The left hand area contains an icon for club selection, and you can move up or down through **driver, number 3 wood, number 5 wood, 3, 5, 7, 9 irons, a sand wedge and putter**. Below this, the stroke direction can be selected by placing the cursor over a clockwise or anticlockwise arrow. This drives a black pixel around a circle in either direction, the ball being indicated by the white spot at the centre. Next to it, a third icon controls the strength of stroke, either increasing or decreasing, and the result is indicated on a vertical bar graph.

The right-hand section shows details of the hole, the distance from tee to hole in yards, par (average number of strokes it should take to put out), shots taken so far on the hole, and the total number of shots you have taken since commencing the round.

The central block contains the hole selection icon which cycles up or down through all 9 or 18 holes, depending on which you selected at the outset. At the bottom is the map selection icon. All the icons are activated by pressing SPACE, hold it down and the entire display area switches to a larger scale map showing the entire hole and your current location, plus adjacent holes, tees, bunkers water hazards etc. Top right of the block is a representation of a windsock indicating wind direction, while a bar graph next to it shows the wind strength. Below the windsock is a golf ball on a tee, centring the cursor over this and pressing space activates the large scale graphic of the golfer, who takes a swing at the ball. It flies over the other icons and off the screen. At this point the top map comes to life, flying along over the landscape below with the golf ball rising up into the air, growing larger in perspective and then smaller as it finally drops to earth with a thud. Once landed, the screen centres on it, and control is returned to the player via the icons for the next shot.

The game is error trapped to the extent of warning you against silly shots, like taking a wood to the ball on the putting surface or trying to get out of rough with a putter. The accompanying packaging gives all the general rules of championship play as well as local out of bounds rules for Royal St George's and the loss of strokes incurred for moving your ball should it fall into the water.

Presentation 79%
The options, packaging and attractive appearance on screen invite you in.

Graphics 83%
The icons work well and this is a good looking golf course.

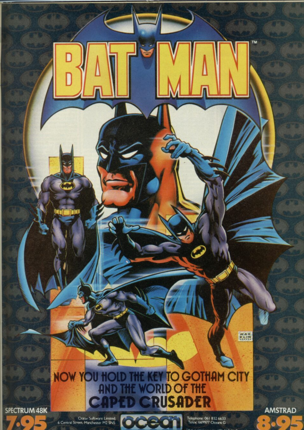
Sound 71%
A bit limited, thwacks of club on ball, bounces and some applause when you hole out.

Playability 84%
Icons make it very easy to get into killing the usual initial frustration associated with simulations.

Addictive qualities 80%
Depends on your liking of golf, but even the less impressed may find a modicum of addictivity here.

Value for money 82%
A bit above the average, but the presentation and packaging all add value.

Overall 80%
May even entice the non-golfing fraternity, but certainly a must for golfers and sports simulation enthusiasts.



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THE WAY OF THE TIGER

Gremlin Graphics, £9.95 cass, £14.95 disk



Abandoned as an orphan on the shores of the Island of Tranquil Dreams, you were adopted by an old monk — Naijishi, Grand Master of the Dawn. The monks on the island worship Kwon, the god of unarmed combat, and your adopted father has trained you in the martial arts — it's a Ninja he wants to make of you, not just a man! Before becoming worthy of the noble title of Ninja you must pass three tests of endurance and skill in combat against opponents chosen by the Master. Tests of your skills in unarmed combat, pole fighting, and Samurai sword fighting await in this computerised version of the role playing adventure books.

The cassette version of the game comes as a set of two tapes, while the disc version is self contained. A master program has to be loaded before the fighting can start, which puts up a menu screen and allows you to opt for practice in one of the three forms of combat, or you can take the full test, working your way through all three stages. Select keyboard or joystick, press the key to select an entry point in the game and the fighting begins.

An oriental tune introduces the action, which takes place on a large window on the screen. The status areà gives a readout on Endurance and Inner Force levels, represented by circles at the bottom of the display. For every complete circle of Endurance used by a combatant, one point of Inner Force is deducted and the fighter who runs out of Inner Force first loses the contest. The opponents sent against you by the Master have different levels of Endurance and Inner Force as well as a variety of skills. As a fighter's Inner Force wanes, the power of the blows he lands and the effect they have on his opponent is reduced.

The display system features a triple scroll effect, which allows three levels of animation on the screen and provides animated backdrops. The fighting takes place in the foreground and the middle and background animation areas are used for incidental action. Pole fighting, for instance, takes place on a pole perched on the banks of a river: logs float down the watercourse while ducks paddle about, occasionally taking to the air.

In the first section of the game you find yourself wandering in the desolate desert land of Orb without a weapon. The Master





has collected a range of opponents to pit against his trainee Ninja, and they are not all humanoid. He's not averse to animating the odd rock or obelisk to test your skills. Anticipation mounts as you await the first opponent. Suddenly, a pointy-eared goblin jumps out from behind a rock — the battle is on! As in the other two sections of the game, control is effected in the usual beat em up manner, using eight directions in combination with fire to make a total of sixteen moves. Once the goblin is out of the way a floating spectre creeps up from behind and gradually zaps away your strength. Each time an opponent is despatched your status levels are topped up in readiness for the next fight. The contest continues until all the Master's challengers have been defeated or you die. Simple, really!

Once the desert of Orb has been cleared of aggressive nasties, it's on to the Pole Fighting section. Standing on a pole spanning a river, you're suddenly confronted by an armour plated skeleton with a very nasty grin on its face. Armed with quarter staffs you enter battle, attempting to wear each other's Inner Force levels down to zero. The skeleton is not alone — once it has been despatched to the murky depths of the river whence it came, other pole fighters join the fray including another Ninja and a mean looking dwarf with a club.

Survival in the pole fighting leads to the Grand Temple and the final section of the game. The scene of the last test is majestic indeed. Snow-capped mountains rise to meet the sky on the horizon and the Temple appears behind you. Birds flutter overhead, labourers trundle wheelbarrows to and fro and all seems very peaceful until . . . a mongolian sword fighter with an enormous knife in his hand jumps up. In Samurai Sword Fighting the Master pits you against the greatest warriors he knows, some of whom can perform fighting feats which you simply can't match. It's possible to defeat the Master's minions, but difficult . . .

If the swordsmen are all defeated, one further test remains — it's time to confront the Grand Master himself. If you are able to prevent him from making mincemeat of your corpse you have truly have earned the right to be a Ninja, 'speaker of wisdom, protector of the weak. One most powerful'.



CRITICISM

1 **Gremlin Graphics have built quite a reputation around the quality of their graphics in the past and the detail in the backdrops and animation in *Way of the Tiger* adds to Gremlin's standing. Characters are well drawn and movement is tight and realistic. The impression of parallax given by the differing speeds of horizontal scrolling in near, middle and farground is a nice cosmetic touch but like all beauty, is only skin deep. An improvement in speed would have been all the guilding of the water-lily that I would have asked for. The different skills and fighting methods of the various opponents make the game a constant challenge. The incidental animation lends a realism and atmosphere that adds nicely to the overall feel, and proves there is still room for fighting games — but they'll have to be good to beat this one.**

2 All these Karate type games were getting a bit monotonous, but this one has put some new life into this particular type of game. *Way of the Tiger* has three distinct stages, all of which are superbly executed and it is lots of fun to play. The graphics are well detailed and probably the best featured in a game of this type. Watching someone else play the game is great fun even if you are not an expert yourself. There is lots of action going on all the time and with the assorted effects in the background it all looks very convincing. As with most beat em ups, the game is instantly playable and the increasing difficulty of your opponents make it very addictive.

3 *After seeing some preview pictures, I was quite impressed and hoped the gameplay in the finished version would match the detailed graphics. Unfortunately I was a bit disappointed with the slowish animation and the poor response on first playing the game. The game is excellent if you like lots of pretty graphics such as water falls, market traders, ducks and the like, but I couldn't get used to the gameplay and found that sticking to using a single move got me through quite a few characters. All of the modes of combat have something a bit different about them, but basically the game is repetitive. More variation should have been used with fewer frames of animation: this would have made the game much better to play. If you've got a craving for bash and blow games then this could well fill the gap as it is a very good game. It may not appeal to everyone's taste, however.*

Presentation 85%
Pretty packaging with comprehensive instructions in no less than four languages.

Graphics 91%
Lots of background animation.

Sound 89%
Nice oriental tune at beginning but the spot FX are nothing special.

Playability 92%
Like all martial arts a little practice goes a long way.

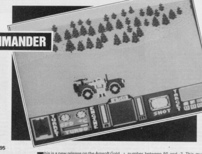
Addictive qualities 91%
With three different types of fighting you won't tire of the game quickly.

Value for money 86%
If you like martial arts games it's money well spent.

Overall 91%
Not as colourful as some fighting games but there is plenty of variety.

TANK COMMANDER





Amsoft £9.95 cass, £13.95 tape

CRITICISM

1 Amsoft have been a leading inspiration in the field of Amstrad games and this one is a reasonable exhibit. The graphics are bright but blocky and the animation is poor. The game idea is tried and trusted and nothing new or daring is included. Sound is limited to explosions and poor at that. What the game has I don't know but I found it very playable and addictive. At a few pounds less for both versions I would see it as a good buy but at the moment it's just bye to hard earned cash.

2 This is an excellent combat simulation game from Amsoft Gold that combines playability, good graphics, and addictive qualities. It is one of the best games I have seen on the combat simulation front for some time. There are a few complaints, such as the length of time needed for each screen to be loaded up, and also as you leave each screen the action halts for a moment then you are off again. The graphics are a bit too green but that does not affect the playability stakes.

3 This looks quite impressive when you first see someone play it, but once you get to grips with it yourself it's soon evident that the game is slow and pretty dull to play. Moving from one screen to another and transferring from plan view to 3D takes a considerable amount of time due to the programming accessing the disk making the game slow to play. The graphics are plain average and the sound nothing more than a few explosions. If you want a good tank game then try something else.

This is a new release on the Amsoft Gold label that puts you in the driving seat of a tank behind enemy lines. Your task is to rescue friendly agents whilst avoiding, naturally enough, having tank and torso scattered liberally over the countryside. From the loading screen press fire on either joystick or keyboard and the tank is found on the tactical screen. This depicts a section of map, the position and current direction of the tank and the all important dashboard which monitors speed, turret orientation, engine temp, turbo level, message window, damage indicator, agents rescued and useful information on any targets present.

Pressing the space bar from here accesses the large scale map giving the location of your agent as a blinking red cross and the location of any known enemies as flashing red dots-the moving ones obviously out to get your tank which is represented by a turret. Pressing fire will return the tank to the tactical screen and then, using whatever intelligence gained, the tank can be aimed towards an agent in a left, right, forward, backwards style at varying speeds across the different terrains. Roads are obviously the fastest with grass, rough land and marsh all gradually reducing speed of progress. Pressing T will give a turbo boost for short periods but watch the temperature as overheating will impair engine performance.

Five different types of armoured aggressors try to bring about a premature end to your rural ramblings and although some encounters can be avoided, sooner or later it's time to hurl a few home grown high explosives about. When an enemy appears in your locale, you can tell what it (they) is (are) by the different representation on screen. Pressing fire in this position or getting too close to your brothers in armies takes you into that battlefield. Here the message window gives the relative position of the closest target and the target information portion of the screen gives a pictorial representation of its type, armour level — which depletes as hits are made, firepower and range.

When in combat, your gun elevation is displayed above the message window as a number between 50 and -7. This must be controlled dependent upon target range. Once your shells start to rain the shortfall indicator will give readings by which to increase or decrease gun elevation. However, if shells are too wide of the mark it will give erroneous readings. Several hits will have to be made upon nasties dependent upon their armour rating but most of them sport an Achilles heel which will lead to their destruction with only a single shot but only experience will tell where they are.

To pick up an agent, the sector he occupies must be first cleared of any danger before he'll zip out in his jeep and give a smart salute. Each time an agent is picked up a thermometer type gauge of spies rescued will increase. Present status is displayed on screen by pressing escape whilst in tactical mode and your rating and number of kills and agent saved displayed. If however, it all turns out a little sour and there is small part of a field somewhere that will be forever England, or at least very badly stained, then the status screen is displayed and provides the final testament to someone who had steel but unfortunately, no longer has any permanent bodily domicile in which to store it.

Presentation 70%
Overall presentation could have been much better

Graphics 75%
Probably the best part of the game

Sound 45%
Too few sound effects

Playability
Soon loses its initial appeal

Addictive qualities 60%
Unknown addictive quality

Value for money 65%
Would be good value if reduced in price

Overall 65%
An ordinary game with no remarkable features

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KUNG-FU MASTER

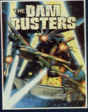
AMSTRAD

DISK £14.95

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BOUNDER

Gremlin Graphics, £8.95 cass, £12.95 disk



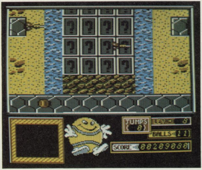
The platform game is dead, long live the platform game! Confused? If not you will be, since the newest offering from **Gremlin Graphics** is a platform game but not in the traditional sense of the word. Gremlin have taken the conventional 'side on' view, turned it through ninety degrees and come up with a platform derivative that can only be described as WEIRD! Enter the surreal world of *Bounder*, a world where tennis balls bounce high — higher than you would expect. And this is where the platforms come in. It's hard to see that platforms have anything to do with this game, as they are seen from above — but they are there, and if you fail to recognise this, then the game is lost from the start.

The action takes place far, far above the ground with the simple object of guiding an extremely vibrant tennis ball through ten tortuous courses, avoiding all manner of hazards along the way. Each course consists of several platform arrangements, with an expanse of colourful scenery below. The ball moves 'in' and 'out' of the screen to give the impression that it is in fact bouncing up and down.

Most obstacles encountered throughout the various levels can be jumped with relative ease, but some need that little bit of extra 'boost' to get over or around them. So, there are blocks marked with an arrow to give that added push. Catapults are more powerful than the arrows and are found on higher levels, along with disappearing platforms that must be jumped on with caution and transporters that teleport the ball from one point on the screen to another. Moving platforms may also be found on the higher levels. Of course, things are not quite that simple, for the ten levels also have their own fair share of nasties in the form of assorted aliens, such as strange bat-like creatures and jet propelled fish and flies, along with many devious traps, all in true Indiana Jones fashion. Other hazards include impassable walls which must be jumped around and mines that explode into deadly pieces of shrapnel. Fans blow the ball off course and can prove both useful and a pain, while spinning sticks are definitely most annoying.

To make life a bit easier there are plenty of question marks scattered along the courses. These squares, when landed on, give a surprise, usually in the form of pleasantries such as extra lives, 'jumps' or points. Occasionally you find yourself being chomped by a pair of evil gnashing teeth or squashed by a pair of boxing gloves, but at least the squares stay the same every game. As the game progresses through the levels, the course gets longer and becomes far more treacherous, with sneaky dead ends in mazes of impassable walls as well as an increasing number of aliens to hinder progress. At the end of every level there is a bonus screen — several question marks are dotted about the screen and you must land on as many as possible before you run out of 'jumps'. You start with a limited supply of jumps, but they are only used up on bonus screens. Should you successfully land on every square then you are awarded a Bounder bonus of 10,000 points, along with the standard bonus of 10,000 points for completing the level. You then move on to the next level and yet more hassle . . .

Still confused? Don't be — the game is certainly easier to play than it is to describe!



CRITICISM

1 *Bounder* **really is a curious type of game and, gasp, it's actually fairly original! Quite unusual that, with the current state of most Amstrad software. It's a very neat idea and the game is fun to play though it's often quite annoying as you get killed when your tennis ball looks fairly safe. This happens quite a lot when landing on the very edge of a platform. Gremlin have done a good job again . . . there's lots to explore and no shortage of challenge to this one.** ***Bounder*****'s main appeal lies with its excellent graphics and sound: they really are quite stunning. The landscape the errant tennis ball springs over is very pretty indeed though it can get confusing as to what's dangerous and what isn't.** ***Bounder*** **is very neat indeed — it's fairly addictive and both pretty to see and listen to. Definitely worth a quick shufty**



at next time you're in your local software emporium.

2 I had heard a lot about this game on other computers and to be honest was not expecting it to be very good at all. I mean, where's the fun in bouncing a ball around a screen? What a surprise I had. It is an excellent game which is very addictive and well programmed. It does take some time to master the art of controlling the ball but after that problem is resolved there's a lot of tricky game to play through. It is definitely a game your Amstrad deserves to have in its system.

3 *I thought this game was loads of fun to play but it did take some time to get into. At first it was all too easy to roll the tennis ball off the platforms. The graphics are first rate as are the sound effects. The scenery is very pretty and the game itself has a lot of addictive qualities. The further you progress into it the more you want to play it. One for the collection without a doubt.*

Presentation 88%
Joystick and keys both provided for and a neat scrolling message provides handy information.

Graphics 90%
Very good indeed with imaginative use of colour and some nice animation to be seen.

Sound 91%
Catchy little ditty beetles away throughout the game but it could prove somewhat tedious after a while.

Playability 92%
Instantly hooks and is nice and easy to get into.

Addictive qualities 91%
The larger map pushes on most gamesters but having to go through old screens every new game could get tiresome.

Value for money 91%
Not a bad bargain at all.

Overall 91%
A neat little game that is well worth a squint at.

DOOMSDAY BLUES

PSS and Ere Informatique, £9.95 cass, £14.95 disk

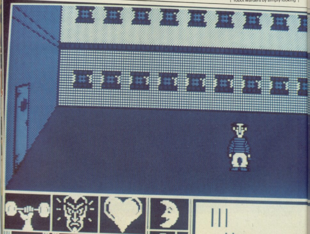


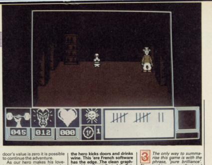
Life can be rough at times. Having your planet taken over by machines which use the simple expediency of exterminating all life forms not held together by rivets can give waking up in the morning a charm otherwise unbeknown to mankind. On this particular morning you wake up in the cosy bosom of cell 412. What can be bad about that? After all they have not terminated one's life, yet! Mind you, it is sad that you are the only member of the human race left alive, and are therefore a member of the most exclusive club in the world. Pretty shabbytat eh? Obviously there is not much to do and no-one to play with. What if the machines have saved you purely to provide amusement when they get bored?

Paranoia starts to creep in, then suddenly a human lament penetrates your consciousness. The cry echoes along the corridors; it's a woman by the sound of it! Perhaps there is another Human Being alive — and a female at that! It may yet be possible to find Simian comfort! Who wants to hang around and wait to have limbs pulled out by bored automatons? It's much more fun to go out and explore the unknown. After all, there comes a time and all that, and at most it can only cost an arm and a leg . . . ! There is a minor problem, of course. Nature has not been that kind to yours truly, but even so the choice is severely limited nowadays. The ugliest man is bound to be in with a chance. After a deep breath it's time to scamper out of the cell and try to find the owner of the tortured lament.

There is a severe shortage of chocolates, flowers and so on, and in the absence of a suit and black briefcase, our hero has to tailor each of his three characteristics of strength, courage and fitness to best effect for the task ahead. So, resplendent in a hoopy French shirt and Doc Martens, it's time to brave the unknown after making a few simple preparations.

Initially the hero begins with ten points in each of three attributes. There are a further seventy points to share out, and by adding and subtracting values it is possible to arrive at a desired persona made up from strength for opening doors, couragê with which to 'stun' the robot warders by simply looking





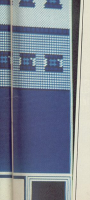
at them (the hero of this game is very butch) and fitness, which ticks slowly away as the game proceeds.

Running into any of the nasties rapidly drains fitness and if fitness points run out this little French philanderer throws a brief wobbly before departing from his mortal coil. Prisons are known for their numerous doors, and opening them is fairly crucial. Subtlety isn't a major forte of our hero in this respect and each door encountered is opened by booting it until the lock breaks. Some doors are stronger than others and as Monsieur approaches a door it appears in the object window on the bottom right of the screen with a value for the door's strength. Pressing fire then reduces the little fellow's strength by one as he gives the door a resounding kick. Once the door's value is zero it is possible to continue the adventure.

As our hero makes his lovelorn way around the prison the passage of hours is shown at the bottom of the screen with a reminder of whether it's day or night. With each passing hour one point of fitness is used, so speed is of the essence. It is possible to coax the fervent Froggie into a run by pressing the fire button when nothing is indicated in the item window — but take care, running also drains fitness. The robot warders never get tired. They are charmless nerks and fairly lethal with it, as running into any of the nasties will prove. Contact with robots rapidly drains your fitness.

Luckily the robots' deadliness is as marked as their predictability and they can be avoided with the aid of careful clock watching. The need to hang around before moving allows our man to get his head down for a kip now and again, and during sleep as the passage of time has no effect upon his fitness level. As with any of the objects in the game, using a bed is done by pottering up to it until it appears in the object window and then pressing the fire button.

As the man pants his way around the prison, several items can be found which aid recovery from his exertions. If his muscles start to flag, a quick bite to eat should help and for the price of 1 Franc, a strong cup of coffee, courtesy of the 'expresso-vend', should make a braver man of him. As this program was written in France, popping down the cellar for a quick bottle of wine proves a real tonic, renewing your character's health. Of course, all of these benefits are not without their own particular dangers . . . as you'll discover during play . . .



CRITICISM

1 **Compelling and colourful with good graphics and a definite touch of humour in the animation: watch when the hero kicks doors and drinks wine. This 'ere French software has the edge. The clean graphics, although attributed to Catherine Vagnon, were passed through the very capable hands of Michel Rho, the man responsible for the superb graphics of** *Get Dexter*. **It shows . . .** *Doomsday Blues* **should have seasoned strategy players pondering, and arcade addicts taking a well earned rest as they soak up the story. Well worth a look — this is a great game written for the Amstrad, on the Amstrad. Get it!**

2 Wowee. This game is really yummie. Okay, to be serious for a moment, PSS have backed a winner with this one. An original idea with superlative graphics and cunning gameplay makes *Doomsday Blues* a wonderful challenge and fun to play. The character animation is excellent and only let down a little by the slightly more simplistic robots. But the game oozes atmosphere and tension. The fine detail and subtle use of colour give the game an individual appeal that sets it apart from other, more mundane offerings. More games of this type and the Amstrad will lose forever the cruel and unjustified description of an 'upgraded Spectrum'. If there has to be one criticism it's that sometimes you have to be cautious with your character's progress and this can slow the game down a little. At the end of the day though, this one has to be a winner.

3 *The only way to summarise this game is with the phrase, 'pure brilliance'. The graphics are excellent and there is plenty of colour. It is fun to play and will be one of my popular games for a long time to come. The loading tune is probably one of the best I've heard on the Amstrad but the spot FX are not up to the same quality. It is quite a difficult game to get into but once you get going, it is really compulsive.*

Presentation 90%
Clear, concise instructions and packaging.

Graphics 93%
Very colourful and detailed.

Sound 89%
The loading tune is exceptional but the spot FX could be better.

Playability 91%
Takes time to actually get into the game.

Addictive qualities 91%
Once into the game it's difficult to stop.

Value for money 90%
A bit above the going rate but still worth every penny.

Overall 91%
Another brilliant arcade adventure game for your collection.

Update:
Under normal circumstances, hang-gliding is fun. However, riding a violent thermal over an alien canyon 20K's deep can be less than enjoyable. 'Concentrates the mind wonderfully' is the phrase that springs to mind . . . .

THE TERMINAL MAN





STORY BY KELVIN GOSNELL© DRAWN BY OLIVER FREY©



EDGE TOWARDS ME AND LINK HANDS — KEEP YOUR EYES COVERED OR I'LL BURN OUT YOUR OPTIC NERVES...
DON'T LET GO: KEEP MOVING, WE'RE GOING OUT THE WAY WE CAME IN!
MOVE!
HOW DID YOU WORK THAT? DOME TO MENTION IT, WHAT DID YOU DO?
CALLED BIOLUMINESCENCE, THINGS LIKE EARTH JELLYFISH HAVE CELLS THAT RADIATE LIGHT TO LURE PREY—
THOSE CREATURES SAW IN THE INFRARED — SO I MUTATED MY VIRUS CELLS TO RADIATE ENOUGH INFRARED TO BLIND THEM—
WHY NOT KILL 'EM WHILE YOU COULD? THEY'RE STILL STOPPING US FROM GETTING ON...
DAMMIT, MANDRELL— I GOT YOU OUT OF THE HOLE DIDN'T I? I SIMPLY HAD NO SPARE ENERGY, NEEDED EVERY OUNCE TO POWER THE LIGHT...
BESIDES WHICH, THERE IS A LITTLE THING CALLED HUMANITY,
WE DON'T HAVE TO KILL EVERYTHING WHICH STANDS IN OUR WAY,
OH— SO IT'S BE-KIND-TO-MUTANTS WEEK, HUH? YOU TELL ME HOW WE GET THROUGH HERE THEN, LADY?
I GUIDE YOU,
?!



Next: Graveyard of the Starships...